

# POLAND'S MEMORY WARS

*Essays on*

illiberalism



EDITED BY JO HARPER

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Essays on Illiberalism

Edited by  
**Jo Harper**



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## FOREWORD

This volume of essays and interviews aims to provide an overview of current Polish politics for both the informed and non-specialist reader. It contains insights into the most recent past and some historical context to help understand and make sense of how “history” plays a key role in Polish public life and politics.

It is intended as an addition to the literature on Poland and the Central and Eastern European (CEE) region in the style and spirit of Sibelan Forrester, Magdalena J. Zaborowska, and Elena Gapova's (eds.) *Over the Wall/After the Fall: Post-Communist Cultures Through the East-West Gaze* and David I. Kertzer's *Politics and Symbols: The Italian Communist Party and the Fall of Communism*.<sup>1</sup>

The book also explores the political uses of history, with reference to Robert Blobaum's *Antisemitism and its Opponents in Modern Poland*; George Sanford's, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre of 1940: Truth, Justice and Memory*; and Piotr M. Majewski's, *Polish Historiography on World War II in Poland after 1989*.<sup>2</sup> On the role of nationalism, I refer to Peter Tokarski's, “Political and Socio-economic Normalisation: An Opportunity for the Dismantlement of Romanticised Nationalism in Poland,” in *Nationalism in the Nation States*, vol. 2 of *Nationalism in Late*

<sup>1</sup> Sibelan Forrester, Magdalena J. Zaborowska, and Elena Gapova, eds. *Over the Wall/After the Fall: Post-Communist Cultures Through the East-West Gaze* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); David I. Kertzer, *Politics and Symbols: The Italian Communist Party and the Fall of Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Robert Blobaum, *Antisemitism and its Opponents in Modern Poland* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); George Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre of 1940: Truth, Justice and Memory* (London: Routledge, 2005); Piotr M. Majewski, *Polish Historiography on World War II in Poland after 1989* (Warsaw: Warsaw University, 2005).

and *Post-Communist Europe*, and Brian Porter's *When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth-Century Poland*.<sup>3</sup>

Each essay can be read as a stand-alone piece that deals with a discrete element of a wider problematic. Often overlapping fragments are set beside one another, using diverse approaches and methodologies. They are intended to offer glimpses into aspects of what appears to be a wider process of change taking place in Europe since the 2008 financial crisis, and in the central and eastern parts of the continent specifically.

The aim of the book is to reach a wider audience, to unravel some complex academic ideas for lay readers and also offer academics some of the benefits of real-time reportage, and experience-based, multi-disciplinary approaches.

It is an attempt to approach the questions why and how PiS returned to power and why and how it is doing what it is doing while in power. The standard journalistic approach tends to lack depth, and a lot of standard political science has tended to neglect multi-disciplinary (mainly the sociological and anthropological) as well as experiential and journalistic perspectives.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Tokarski, "Political and Socio-economic Normalisation: An Opportunity for the Dismantlement of Romanticised Nationalism in Poland," in *Nationalism in the Nation States*, vol. 2 of *Nationalism in Late and Post-Communist Europe*, ed. Egbert Jahn (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2009) and Brian Porter, *When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth-Century Poland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

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## ILLIBERAL, ALIBERAL, ANTI-LIBERAL?

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JO HARPER

This volume of essays and interviews was written by Polish, British, and American academics and journalists, a lawyer, and business people representing a range of political persuasions and lines and aims of enquiry during late 2016, 2017 and early 2018, a period in which one phase—or perhaps phase one—of the End of History appeared to be ending, but a new one had yet to emerge.<sup>1</sup>

The first stage of the postcommunist transition was perhaps an interlude, not the destination at all, as many had thought, or hoped. Or perhaps the destination was indeterminacy itself? Disorder and also stasis (depending on how you look at it) are real enough after all. Without a road map provided by Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS) itself, it is hard to tell.<sup>2</sup>

Defined against a geopolitical background of insecurity and perceived threats, perhaps PiS was just faster than its rivals in understanding its electorate, however unpalatable the latter's views may be. Perhaps Poland was simply reverting to type. Wasn't this New Normal a lot like the Old Normal—in other words: insular, conservative, xenophobic, and statist? But the lack of an immediate “type” to reach for or fall back on adds to the sense of confusion. The book is therefore an attempt to give some shape to the shifting phenomenon that is often

<sup>1</sup> See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> This possibility is explored in Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (London: Allen Lane, 2007) in which she argues that neoliberal free market policies have risen to prominence in some developed countries because of a deliberate strategy of “shock therapy,” which centers on the exploitation of national crises to push through controversial policies while citizens are too emotionally and physically distracted by disasters or upheavals to mount effective resistance. It has certain echoes here.

referred to as the New Normal emerging in this part of Europe and elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

The success of PiS also coincided with—some might argue as a by-product of—the crisis in and of the EU, with centrifugal forces apparently pulling the bloc apart. PiS proposed what it considered a new model of and for Europe, one where everyday language would be more closely mirrored in the public discursive sphere.

To understand what PiS is doing, and attempting to do, is not to condone its actions, but to offer insights into how we got here. The rapidity with which events unfolded in 2017 and 2018 means that we will inevitably lag behind the news. But the book holds few if any predictive illusions, merely attempting to shed light on some key aspects of a multi-dimensional and fluid process. This is a case study, allowing for questions to be raised, insights gleaned and preliminary hypotheses floated.

The book is eclectic in its form, although the essays are linked together by a focus on analyzing power through discourse, in part mythology, and narrative forms of social and political legitimization. This is set within an understanding of societal shifts and shifts within political ideology, in particular with liberalism facing internal and external threats, largely from populist discourses that brought together elements of “economic leftism” and “social rightism,” combining the sacred (Romanticism) and the profane (Positivism).<sup>4</sup>

Liberalism has proved resilient and its resilience is perhaps connected with the problem of defining exactly what it is, what it seeks to achieve. Its apparent timelessness is both its appeal and its weakness in times of crisis, when easier answers are sought.

<sup>3</sup> Mohamed A. El-Erian, “Navigating the New Normal in Industrial Countries,” in *The Per Jacobsson Lecture*, ed. Michael Harrup (Washington, D.C.: International Monetary Fund, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Stuart Shields, “How the East was Won: Transnational Social Forces and the Neoliberalization of Poland’s Post-communist Transition,” *Global Society* 22, no. 4 (2008): 445–468; Stuart Shields, “Neoliberalism Redux: Poland’s Recombinant Populism and its Alternatives,” *Critical Sociology* 41, nos. 4–5 (2015): 659–678; Stuart Shields, “Opposing Neoliberalism? Poland’s Renewed Populism and Post-communist Transition,” *Third World Quarterly* 33 (2012): 359–381. Shields looks at the social impact of neoliberalization and the counter-hegemonic forces this engendered. He views the populist turn as a rejection of neoliberalism, given the absence of a coherent left alternative, and the fact that the anti-neoliberal alternative has come from the nationalist right.

The struggle between Poland and the EU since 2015 can also be seen as a contributing factor in the success of PiS. The party's stand for what it calls Christian values and a moral regeneration of the continent echoes calls from the Catholic Church. The EU epitomizes the secular, liberal, multicultural Europe that PiS so despises.

The two sides are defined by different values, ideological grammar and syntax, the choice and use of subjects and types of reasoning. One is secular, institutional, commercial, wanting less history, more markets, more integration in Europe, more pragmatic, to be part of the European mainstream, perhaps closer to the German Christian Democrats (CDU). The other puts history, mythology and identity center stage. Institutions are there to be challenged and molded for specific aims. It posits an ethnically limited version of the nation and the strong moral role of the Church.

The rise of PiS, alongside Hungarian and Russian populism, meant that economic and social liberalism came under scrutiny. Questions arose as to what the state, as a secular mediator, is for. The issue of pan-national institutions and what they have the right to do also brought into play differing conceptions of Europe: a Christian version, a moral one versus an institutional, secular one.

An enduring dichotomy in Poland that mirrors, imprecisely, this wider discussion, is between *Idealists* and *Realists*, continuing the historical cycles identified by Adam Bromke, which haven't changed much in 200 years. The Romantics (The *Idealists*) based their conception of the nation not on ethnic, linguistic, or religious criteria, but on shared political history. Positivism and political realism (the *Realists*), which emerged after the defeat of the January Uprising of 1863, on the other hand accentuated a more exclusive, ethnic and religious conception of the nation and the state (which at the time didn't exist). This was continued and modified in the ideology of the National Democrats, a party led by Roman Dmowski. Today one can say that it is Donald Tusk and Kaczyński who carry these respective narrative bundles, in modified form but clearly as a continuation of this national conversation.

So, set against this historical background, it is clear that PiS's rise to power was certainly not predestined, nor is it an unequivocal expression of all Poles' needs and wishes. It is also not irreversible and does

not represent the collapse of democracy in Poland, as some commentators seem to have suggested.<sup>5</sup> It has explicable and contingent causes woven into the fabric of postcommunist life and history since 1989, but these are not necessarily its only threads. Unpacking them is often tricky work, as it requires working in the half light of immediate history, but it is no less valuable for that.

PiS is also a relatively variegated entity, and struggles do take place within it, perhaps most obviously between three main blocs, one with a Church-driven social agenda, a nationalist grouping and technocrats-pragmatists. For the time being, its statist impulses to redistribute have not fed into progressive tax plans, or amendments to the tax-free status of the Church. So, a nominally pro-market party that keeps politics, as with every government since 1989, out of fiscal decision-making.

#### COMPETING NARRATIVES

The idea for the book was triggered by two things. The first was the return to power of PiS in October 2015, and its subsequent attempts seemingly to reconstruct Poland in its own image: apparently—depending on one's distaste—a socially regressive or a market interventionist form of illiberalism; or both. The second was the ways in which the striking electoral success of PiS and the immediacy of its attacks on several areas of public life simultaneously have tended to be portrayed outside of Poland, in particular in the Western media, as an abrogation of some often ill-defined or a confused set of—often alternating—liberal ideals, or even in some quarters as a betrayal of such ideals.<sup>6</sup> These

<sup>5</sup> For example: Timothy Garton-Ash, "The Pillars of Poland's Democracy are Being Destroyed," *The Guardian*, January 27, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> *The Independent* newspaper set wrote on January 18, 2016 about "Poland's new ultra-conservative government." Timothy Garton-Ash in *The Guardian* wrote: "The voices of all allied democracies, in Europe and across the Atlantic, must be raised to express their concern about a turn with grave implications for the whole democratic West. And this needs to happen soon." Others saw the collapse of Europe. "A new fault line has opened up between Germany and Poland," Natalie Nougayrède wrote also in *The Guardian* on January 16, 2016. However, not all English-language media followed this line. For example, Luke Coppen "Sorry, Bono, but 'hyper-nationalists' aren't running Poland," *The Spectator*, May 21, 2016. Also "The Problem with Poland," Jan-Werner Müller, *The New York Review of Books*, February 11, 2016.



critiques, particularly those from outside the country, have sometimes missed the mark, if not by exaggerating the threats to democracy—which clearly do exist—then by failing to recognize or take much interest in the wider and deeper structural social and economic issues upon which the political ideology floats. Many also had either—by omission or outright disparagement—failed to take alternatives to the previously governing Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska, PO) party’s “narrative” seriously, whether from the left or the right.

For some commentators it is a simple struggle between good and bad; on the one side a false discourse based on half-truths and authoritarian fantasies, and on the other, one grounded in laws, established norms and facts, in other words the post-war Western model, with its form of legitimation grounded in Weberian legal-rationality.

The working hypothesis floated in much of the Western media and elsewhere seemed to run thus: if the party could hobble the country’s top courts, effectively suspending checks on the constitution, it could then run through a series of reforms that strengthened its hold on power, strip away the remaining checks and balances—while also simultaneously reorienting the civil service, media, army, and education systems. And there is of course much truth in this version. But we are dealing mainly with intentions and possible threats to democracy. If the PiS government wants to exert its power over the democratic and electoral processes, then its politicization of the judiciary will, of course, help. But that is an *if*.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> “Kaczyński: Balcerowicz musi odejść” Kaczyński: Balcerowicz must go (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, October 19, 2005). The term “Balcerowicz musi odejść” (Balcerowicz must go!) was a standard chant at many anti-government rallies in the early 1990s, and it appears to have established itself in the national imagination and popular lexicon. Patronage as a key element of Polish politics is discussed in Anna Gwiazda, “Party Patronage in Poland: the Democratic Left Alliance and Law and Justice Compared,” *East European Politics & Societies* 22, no. 4 (2008): 802–827. An article published on the website of Germany’s national broadcaster *DW.com* on July 17, 2017 illustrates the problem. “Poland’s new judicial reform ‘drops any democratic pretense’” by Teri Schultz. The interviewee, Anne Sanders, was asked if the Polish Supreme Court, were it to be stacked with judges loyal to PiS, would try to influence the next parliamentary election in PiS’s favor? She replied: “Like I said, that’s what the Polish judges I spoke with think might happen...I’m sure the PiS would be only too happy to deal with courts that are biased in its favor. That’s just an assumption.” See also Matthew Tyrmand, “Polish Democracy is in Excellent Health,” *Breitbart*, January 12, 2016: “In June 2014, agents of the Internal Security Agency raided the headquarters of the news weekly *Wprost* after the magazine published

At times, the language about PiS in Western media and from its politicians also subtly—and less subtly—reworked old stereotypes about Eastern Europe that had lain (largely) dormant for some time.<sup>8</sup> Set against the rise of xenophobia in the Anglo-sphere—and centralizing tendencies within the EU—two heartlands of liberalism, these observations also gained further salience.

These phenomena also took place against the backdrop of a rapidly changing external environment. Increased insecurity in Central and Eastern Europe created by the unrest in Ukraine and Russia's increasing regional belligerence; the apparent weakening of the EU after Britain's planned exit; the war in Syria and the inflow of refugees into Europe—alongside a rise in antipathy in Europe towards them and in the CEE region towards the EU for demanding intake quotas; the hardening of nationalist-infused regimes from Ankara, to Budapest and beyond; and Trump-driven nativism in the US, gave a sense that things would not be “normal” again; if by normal one means the social, economic, and political compacts that grew out of the collapse of communism in 1989, whether we call these processes globalization, neo-liberalism, or something else. The widespread media use of the term “post-fact politics”<sup>9</sup>—in reference to President Donald Trump in the US, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, or President Vladimir Putin in Russia—alerts one to the fact that we are all now apparently semioticians. When the British and American media starts to use the language of Jean Baudrillard<sup>10</sup>—even if they do not always realize it—something odd is clearly happening.

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the transcripts of recorded conversations held by some of the highest level PO politicians in Warsaw's most exclusive restaurants (dining at taxpayer expense)."

<sup>8</sup> Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994). Wolff argues that Eastern Europe acquired the status of Western Europe's “Other” during the Age of Reason as part of the colonial drive to subjugate peoples as empires expanded. See also “Mapping Post-Socialist Cultural Studies,” in Forrester, Zaborowska and Gapova, *Over the Wall/After the Fall*, 1–41; Adam Bromke, *Poland's Politics: Idealism Vs. Realism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967). See also as an example, “Polish federation accuses *Daily Mail* of defamation,” *The Guardian*, March 15, 2008.

<sup>9</sup> William Davies, “The Age of Post-Truth Politics,” *The New York Times*, August 24, 2016.

<sup>10</sup> As if somehow there was a golden era of political truth that has ended, articles such as “The Age of Post-Truth Politics” in *The New York Times*, August 24, 2016, seems to miss the point that, in many ways, Donald Trump in the US, Nigel Farage in the UK, and others are—to many voters—more “truthful” than the rhetoric of traditional politicians.

## WHY MYTH?

A political-sociology of myth is useful in this muddled arena, given that the subject matter itself is heavily inflected by the use of political discourse that fuses several elements, from the philosophical and ideological to the mythological and outright nonsensical, but also in that in understanding contemporary political dynamics in Poland—and generally—rational choice appears to be less useful than perhaps it once did.

Furthermore, as the journalist Artur Domosławski, biographer of writer Ryszard Kapuściński, suggests<sup>11</sup> Polish public discourse belongs in many ways to a Central European tradition with a logic that most Anglo-American journalists could not accept.

The Anglo-journalism tradition has it that fiction dressed up as fact is always wrong. “The Central European tradition assumes that what readers want is entertainment and enchantment as much as information,” he told this author in an interview. “Writing in totalitarian environments clearly makes both fact and fiction problematic,” he said.

Kapuściński himself called it *reportage d’auteur*—where the subject matter is filtered through the author’s personality. Some believe it can be traced to a tradition of *gawęda szlachecka*, a traditional Polish anecdotal narrative running through parts of the literary history of the 17th to the 19th centuries, depending on real historical people, facts, and situations as raw material for literary confabulations.

This was also compounded by a process of diachronic and synchronic delinking as the two sides of the semantic chain became increasingly shorn even of a pretense of interdependence. The sphere of signifiers—the words we use—became increasingly divorced from the things they were talking about—the signified. The things that can be measured, objectively, like growth, wealth distribution, tax cuts and the language used to legitimate, or explain, became seemingly lost in

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Baudrillard suggests we live in an era where there exist references with no referents, creating what he calls hyperreality. “The dominant simulacrum,” he argues, “is the model itself, which by its nature already stands for endless reproducibility and is itself already reproduced.” *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* (*La Guerre du Golfe n’a pas eu lieu*) is a collection of three short essays by Baudrillard published in the French newspaper *Libération* and the British newspaper *The Guardian* between January and March 1991.

<sup>11</sup> Artur Domosławski, *Ryszard Kapuściński: A Life* (London: Verso, 2012).

a blur of apparent nonsense. And whether this was a tactic or an ad hoc process, the confusion it wrought was real enough.

Added to this, the notion that the underlying meanings subjects assign to public and private life is a key to life in Poland is clearly important here. The dichotomy of sacred versus profane—private life and public life—interlace Poles' attitudes towards the state, to authority in general and to secular institutions. This has been noted by several writers since the 1980s, most notably by Janine Wedel.<sup>12</sup> Teresa Torańska's collection of interviews with communist leaders is also useful in this regard.<sup>13</sup>

### MYTH AS REALITY

At this point some kind of epistemological foothold is needed to frame and guide us and Gérard Bouchard's "sociology of myth" is a good place to start.<sup>14</sup>

Bouchard sets out three stages in the myth-making process: *diffusion*, *ritualization*, and *sacralization*.<sup>15</sup> In the first stage, a range of actors—including cultural elites, public intellectuals, and academics construct events in a narrative form, giving them a structure that is understandable and consistent with existing collective representations. In the second phase, these narratives become part of social life and the basis for decisions about collective action. The narratives become political myths, and in the third phase, they assume a sacred quality, defining the basic essence of the political community.

The question here is not whether myths accurately reflect reality, but whether they, as narratives, become sacred and are used effectively as normative and "cognitive maps" that define and give meaning to a po-

<sup>12</sup> Janine Wedel, *The Private Poland: An Anthropologist Looks at Everyday Life* (Oxford: Facts on File, 1986).

<sup>13</sup> The "us" and "them" notion was in popular usage during in the period the PRL (People's Poland). See interviews with communist elites, "them" (oni), in Teresa Torańska, *Oni* (London: Aneks, 1985).

<sup>14</sup> Gérard Bouchard, "Pour une nouvelle sociologie des mythes sociaux," *Revue européenne des sciences sociales* (2013): 51.

<sup>15</sup> Della Sala, V. "Political Myth, Mythology and the European Union," *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Special Issue edited by V. Della Sala (2010): 48.

litical community.<sup>16</sup> This is also partly determined by whether they are constructed in a narrative form that is recognizable and understandable.

## DIFFUSION

It seems clear that PiS sought to recode notions of what is acceptable in public discourse. Some key features of a legal and rational form of legitimation it is clear have been replaced with more traditional and cosmological elements: man-made institutions are fallible, whereas moral certainty stemming from the nation, the people, and the Church are immutable. The nationalization of domestic cultural references which highlight a cleansing of the state and of society, and moral regeneration—via purges of the judiciary, of the media, and education—will make Poles proud to be Poles again; so goes this discursive claim to legitimation. Like all such claims, it requires a mythological superstructure.<sup>17</sup>

This element of the mythological process, diffusion, started in the early 1990s as Solidarity broke up and the outlines of the classic Polish nationalist dichotomy reemerged, but the more Romantic wing was just background noise. Like UKIP and Nigel Farage in the UK, the nationalists were widely ignored and ridiculed; seen as redundant in the new Europe.

But disturb the prevailing discourse they did, at a low level, and over time gained some political traction. Claims the new system was as teleological, ideological as the old one did not always fall on deaf ears. This form diffusion was initially aimed at disturbing established lines of thought, denouncing individuals, shaking fists, breaking up the integrity of the existing mythological superstructure.

<sup>16</sup> Jorge Larraín, “The Postmodern Critique of Ideology,” *The Sociological Review* (May 1994): 289–314; Göran Therborn, *The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1980). Their notion of political “interpellation” as a form of political socialization is similar to Pierre Bourdieu’s use of a notion of *Doxa* referring to the learned, fundamental, deep-founded, unconscious beliefs and values, taken as self-evident universals that inform an agent’s actions and thoughts within a particular field, which privilege the dominant and take their position of dominance as self-evident and universally favorable.

<sup>17</sup> See T.H. Rigby and Ferenc Feher, eds., *Political Legitimation in Communist States* (London: Palsgrave Macmillan, 1982) for a discussion on legitimation theory.

## RITUALIZATION

The first real attempt at ritualization came in 2005 when PiS entered a coalition government. But what it said and did<sup>18</sup> was widely ridiculed by most from the center and the left. PiS retreated after two years in power its tail between its legs, but, critically, lessons were learned and a pattern of discursive opposition entered popular discussion.

Whether this represents merely a disruption of the existing order, or something more fundamental—a reorganization of capital perhaps, of the international order or domestic power relations, or a tectonic social change—is mute and beyond the realms of this work.

Myths provide the synthetic superstructure, the limits, the plot, the characters, an easy to use, endlessly flexible and yet a vehicle able to express eternal core values.

The post-war narrative mythological superstructure started to break down. The Left stuck largely with its certainties in the West, as did the Old Right, the Republicans in the US, the relatively sane parts of the Conservative Party. It had nothing new to offer, simply holding on to a system that many saw has having had its day.

But for the New Right myths were created to cover its plans to eviscerate the state, ‘renaturalize’ the social order, wind down welfare and eradicate Political Correctness. In Poland one sees Smoleńsk, attacks on Lech Wałęsa, History Policy, the historian Jan Gross,<sup>19</sup> all concealing or diverting attention away from attacks on the separation of powers, a free media, pluralism in public life, and so on.

## THE STRUGGLE OVER SACRALIZATION

The third phase has thus far since 1989 evaded all contenders for power. What one witnessed, however, after October 2015 was a party

<sup>18</sup> During PiS’ first attempts at governance, between 2005 and 2007, much was made of its plans in concert with junior coalition partner, the League of Polish Families (Liga Polskich Rodzin, LPR), to rewrite the national school curriculum and reduce impediments to patriotic thought. The works of writer Witold Gombrowicz (1904–1969), highly critical of patriotism, Polish or other, were top of the list.

<sup>19</sup> Jan T. Gross, “Poles Cry for ‘Pure Blood’ Again,” *The New York Times*, November 16, 2017.

that operated as if this were not the case, that in fact it had won the arguments, was finally bringing down the hated secular, corrupt, liberal compact. It remains to be seen the extent to which sacralization needs the checks and balances of reality to achieve its own often unspecified goals. Lech Kaczyński remains a mere mortal, for now.

For PiS, this was not really a crisis at all, merely a refit, a recentering of what is normal, that is to say acceptable and possible. Notions of objectivity, consensus, or rule-based decision-making were quickly subsumed under the need to “get things done.” The ends justify the means. This—as Nicholas Richardson explains in this volume of essays—is how democracies start to fail. Permanent crisis, suspended democracy, a state of emergency, diminished civil liberties—the worse things seem to get for Poland, the better they get for PiS. This is also mirrored in the European Commission’s criticism of the PiS government’s interference in the highest court, the Constitutional Tribunal: the more the EU attacks Poland, the more defensive—a natural default position for Jarosław Kaczyński and his core electorate—it becomes.

#### OLD MYTHS—LIBERALISM

But liberalism is a nebulous term, and democracy takes many forms. This book is an attempt to dig a bit deeper and scrape away some of the layers of meaning to arrive at what Dariusz Czaja and Joanna Średnicka construct as the essences, archetypes, and deeper mythologies underpinning the subjects’ awareness of themselves and the world they live in. Here, the martyrological mythology of Polish national identity looms large.<sup>20</sup> As Czaja suggests, this is often about bodies: dead bodies (Smoleńsk, Lech Kaczyński, Józef Piłsudski); foreign bodies (refugees), female bodies (abortion, IVF), and gay bodies.

<sup>20</sup> Stanisław Eile, *Literature and Nationalism in Partitioned Poland, 1795–1918* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 2000). Romantic poetry, Eile argues, and its idea of national messianism, is at the core of this study (nineteenth century novelists: Mickiewicz, Słowacki, and Krasiński). He considers the role played by the notion of pre-partitioned Poland in the development of the idea of “Polishness” in the course of the nineteenth century. See also Geneviève Zubrzycki, *Crosses of Auschwitz: Nationalism and Religion in Post-Communist Poland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

At the same time, one also needs to be aware of one's own, often covert, hermeneutics: preconceptions, assumptions, and normative preoccupations. Are these bodies—refugees, women, the dead—somehow more revered in the West, or by journalists? Some way through preparations for the book, the Brexit vote took place, and it became more evident that this could also be a description of other parts of Europe, the US, and the UK in 2016 and 2017: enfeebled social democracy, liberalism prepared to succumb to harsher forms of capitalist accumulation, and the rise of populism tinged with xenophobia. The past is always preferable to the future, as Farage and Little England, Le Pen and Greater France, etc. fuelling anti-free trade and anti-immigrant sentiments remind us. One could change the names and other details, but the story would remain very similar.

#### LIBERALISM'S FOOT SOLDIERS—THE FREE PRESS

An exploration of the overarching Western liberal epistemological framework for explaining PiS is not a bad place to start. How and why do we think we know what we know? In particular, a salient area of discursive formulation is how English-language reporters on Poland write the first drafts of this history. This angle of enquiry gives us—or some of us—as foreigners, who inevitably view Poland from a somewhat different perspective, a useful foothold in what are sometimes very insular Polish debates. This insularity as much as their content, in turn, appeared to aggravate further external castigation from places such as the OSCE, the European Commission, and the IMF.<sup>21</sup>

As the editor of the collection, I originally planned to ask journalists writing for English-language media to write about their trade, using the methods available to that trade. The book was to be a collection of first-hand micro narratives about the wider narratives being written, a kind of meta-theoretical study of how journalists on the ground write what they write. I wanted to ask them to explain, in their own words, how they construct the meanings they convey: journalism as a useful heuristic device, in other words. At the coal face of history one

<sup>21</sup> Mehreen Khan, "Poland Faces Escalating Risks to Growth, Warns IMF," *The Financial Times*, May 16, 2016.



cannot always see the bigger picture and in a sense this is a story created in the telling: what do we see, how do we see it, for whom do we write, for whom do we think we are writing, and how is this symbolic hinterland made?

The choice of looking at the media in the Anglo-Saxon world is not of course necessarily representative of all Western media, e.g., Spanish, Italian, or German. And this analysis is skewed to an area that is a) one I am more familiar with, b) one that many in the previous government were from or were familiar with and c) it was a world that Poland sought to enter and then did, and one it has been managing with ever since.

The lack of interest from many journalists working in Poland and abroad was disappointing, if unsurprising. Whether it reflected a lack of time, conflicts of interest, intrinsic differences in method, frames of reference or purpose, or if it expressed more systemic and ideological needs or just personal disinterest is perhaps irrelevant. What was clear to me was that the news grinds on without the need for explanation or self-reflection from the inside, itself a cog in the production and distribution of narratives. News as a commodity needs furnishing with people and events, and discursive borders need to be policed. Those of us who have witnessed a little of how the Western media works on the ground in Poland know that stepping outside of the borders, the often enclosed hermeneutics of owners' and editors' ideological predilections, is a dangerous business, and one that many reporters neither want nor often contemplate doing.

Armed, thus, with the requisite righteous indignation and acknowledged professional impotence, the project commenced. An early entry was the question of language. This sounds simple enough; listen to what people say and write it down, as one Warsaw reporter used to tell me about being a journalist. But it takes us directly to the heart of the beast: the notion of truth and sources, how we know what we know, and does it need to true.

So, as all research must, the approach was adapted to overcome these methodological impediments. The methodology became one that focused more on the consumption end of the production process, i.e., as a reader, a consumer of the news "product," then working backward, inducing a way toward some kind of generalized set of

truths or hypotheses. The results were—again—sadly far from surprising. The more egregious examples of what I am tempted, with some reservations, to call neo- or quasi-colonial reporting have been many and varied since PiS came to power in October 2015, but a few structural strands run through the narrative body.

*The Financial Times*, *Economist*, and *Wall Street Journal* tended, of course, to bemoan the markets' reactions to PiS's apparent market illiberalism<sup>22</sup> (taxes on banks, supermarkets, higher spending on welfare); concur with warnings from ratings agencies; and find common cause in the dismay emanating from Brussels and London, as indicated by placing investments on hold. The rhetorical devices used indicate what we will be fed: "hard-right," "xenophobic," "nationalistic." The return of a discourse of "populism"—a term that is itself rarely analyzed or defined—to identify all opposition to prevailing orthodoxies merely confuses the situation by, apparently, simplifying it.

This was compounded by the arrival of English chaps spreading a colonial message with almost missionary zeal. Supported by business and political intermediaries drawn from the same British class system, the room for anything other than standard free market logic was largely divorced from perceived electoral viability. The Left lost the arguments, the sacred discourse had it. The future was liberal democracy and open markets.

But at the point of sacralization this teleological way of thinking was challenged. Not by the Left, but from the hard right, the alt-right. Exploiting postmodernist ideas of fluid benchmarks of truth, narratives as opposed to facts, they started to throw new words and terms around; some stuck, others didn't. It didn't matter, its job to disturb the status quo succeeded. The liberal media fell into defense

<sup>22</sup> *The Financial Times*, January 4, 2016: "Poland's leaders and people opted to embrace EU values. Membership helped them achieve a level of prosperity and political clout in a wider Europe difficult to imagine in 1989. If Warsaw continues to deviate, its friends and allies should do everything in their power to persuade it to return to the path that led to such success." In an article published in *The Financial Times* on April 12, 2016 entitled, "Investors worry over Poland's political direction," the author, Henry Foy, covers all bases: "Ultra-conservative, populist, broadly Eurosceptic and nationalist, the Law and Justice party has wasted little time in using the first parliamentary majority in Polish democratic history to push through a range of political, economic and social reforms. Overseas investors have been left to worry and work out what this means for them."

mode. The reporters in Warsaw tell us nothing more than the stories they tell. But they offer insights into this war of narratives.

When the Western media do get around to “doing history,” it is focusing on its political functions rather than what we may or may not learn in school about the past, it tends to congratulate itself on merely having done so, at the expense of any real analysis, both of why it itself has suddenly fallen upon the subject and why and how it actually matters. It reads as if written by the cleverest girl in class listing places where history is important.<sup>23</sup> It is progress of sorts. “History certainly didn’t end in 1989—but now it’s back with a bang, just as we prepare to celebrate the centenary of the first world war armistice,” Nougayrède writes, before quoting Francis Fukuyama saying “identity politics are in fact politics of recognition,” without elaborating.

“Europe’s present angst, drawn from multiple crises and middle-class discontent, comes with a reappraisal of historical notions that were once deemed rock-solid but which no longer seem to be so... Everything is up for grabs. Consensus on basic facts is no longer guaranteed.”<sup>24</sup>

But were these things always middle class, were they ever rock solid, was there ever consensus? It reads like someone who’s just discovered their version of the world is simply that, theirs.

On the social wing of the liberal critique of PiS, meanwhile, one sees, for example, Poland’s favorite foreign historian Norman Davies<sup>25</sup> fretting about Poland falling back into its bad old ways, many of which he

<sup>23</sup> Natalie Nougayrède, “Europe’s future now rests on who owns the story of its past,” *The Guardian*, February 14, 2018.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Norman Davies, “PiS jest najbardziej mściwym gangiem w Europie,” *Newsweek Polska*, April 25, 2016. A review of Davies’ book *Rising ‘44: The Battle for Warsaw*, entitled “Those Streets Over There,” by John Connolly published in the *London Review of Books* on June 24, 2004 notes: “Davies suggests that all the Jews who survived owed their lives to Polish beneficence: ‘More Jews were rescued in Poland than anywhere else. The figure is usually put at 100,000.’ Polish historians believe that Poles massacred Jews in 24 towns in the summer and autumn of 1941. In July 1941, Poles in Jedwabne murdered Jews in a day-long pogrom, as we know from Jan Gross’s book *Neighbors*, published in 2001. Since then, Polish researchers have located 23 other towns where Poles massacred Jews. Christian Davies, meanwhile, offers an excellent overview of these issues: Christian Davies, “The Conspiracy Theorists Who have Taken over Poland,” *The Guardian*, February 16, 2016.

had trouble recognizing in his earlier analyses of interwar anti-Semitism in Poland.<sup>26</sup> Poland then, in some subtle ways, became a child again in the eyes of its worried parents, a place seen through idealized lenses, as if PiS were somehow a symptom of collective pathology and not as an expression—however clumsy—of a healthy organism.

PiS lends itself to easy demonization,<sup>27</sup> but its machinery still needs to exist and its narrative wheels oiled.<sup>28</sup> On the ground, many Anglo-American press reporters do not speak much Polish, and, when confronted with stories that require some knowledge of the language, tend to follow what they think they already know, ask people they know who will interpret or translate for them, or simply avoid reporting on a subject that takes them away from established—English-language—sources. Talking to “ordinary” Poles who do not speak

<sup>26</sup> Jacob Soll, “History as Fantasy,” *New Republic*, March 29, 2012.

<sup>27</sup> Olga Wysocka, *Populism in Poland* (Florence: European University Institute, ECPR General Conference, 2007). Wysocka posits that populism is a rejection of key elements of modernity, based on assumptions of a fundamental unity of “the people” and stressing what she calls the “vertical dimension,” which may exclude, for example, the elite at the top and foreigners at the bottom, and in this way promotes what she calls “solidarism,” “the people” being the only “legitimate sovereign” distinguished from, and counterpoised to, the power elite, from whom power is to be retrieved. Populism also emphasizes negativism reacting against elites and institutions: anti-capitalism, anti-Semitism, anti-urbanism, anti-modernism, and so on. Wysocka suggests, rightly I believe, that PiS’s political discourse has been based largely on negation (and PO’s a negation of a negation). Wysocka discusses two typologies of populism: first, “soft-populism,” which is used by all politicians (especially in election campaigns) and is a rhetorical part of any political strategy, and the second, a “hard-populism” that usually has a more radical tone and direction. Lech Kaczyński, she suggests, evoked “hard populism” in his use of a notion of “Solidary Poland” (*Polska Solidarna*), counterposed against “Liberal Poland” (*Polska liberalna*). See Cas Mudde, “In the Name of the Peasantry, the Proletariat, and the People: Populisms in Eastern Europe,” in *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, ed. Mény, Yves and Yves Surel (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 215–31. See also Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991) and *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity/Blackwell, 1990), and Hans-Georg Betz, “Against the Current—Stemming the Tide: the Nostalgic Ideology of the Contemporary Radical Populist Right,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9, no. 3 (2004): 311–27, and Sean Hanley, “Getting the Right: Redefining the Centre-Right in Post-Communist Europe,” *Journal of Communist Studies and Transformation Politics* 20, no. 3 (Sept. 2004): 145–154.

<sup>28</sup> Kate Maltby, “William and Kate have been duped into endorsing Poland’s ugly nationalism,” *The Guardian*, July 21, 2017. “...we send our royals to coo over revisionist history and sup with parliamentarians in their quick breaks between tearing up a constitution. The royals should be ashamed for taking part in this week’s whitewash. But we should save much of our anger for the politicians who deployed them.” Neither is the “we” defined, nor how the constitution is being torn up.

English sometimes evokes a set of primary emotional responses among other subjects: fear, shame, pride. Poles who do not speak English, or do not try, tend to have less affection for the outside world, or so it appears to the untrained eye, while many translators-interpreters also want to spin Poland in a certain light for foreigners.<sup>29</sup>

So, the sources that are found are those that tend to agree with a preestablished worldview and its assumptions. The Western narrative appears to assume, above all, that Poland is a place in which a kind of Whig<sup>30</sup> version of history is—or should be, with “our help”—destined to win out in the end, with its dominant telos as the victory of process above outcomes, of individual freedom over state-power, and the defeat of goal-based, theological, and statist ideologies. Oxford will make it to the Vistula at last.<sup>31</sup> The homogenization of competing ideologies makes this inevitable, the story goes. The Washington Consensus, among other narratives propagated in the early 1990s, has

<sup>29</sup> In *Shoah*, Claude Lanzmann’s documentary about the Holocaust, there is a scene in which Lanzmann interviews a group of Polish women in a small town in southern Poland via a Polish interpreter. He senses the words are being somehow cleansed of their anti-Semitism by the interpreter. See also Anna Gonerko-Frej, Małgorzata Sokół, *Ideological Battlegrounds—Constructions of Us and Them Before and After 9/11* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016).

<sup>30</sup> Whig history is an approach to historiography that presents the past as an inevitable progression towards ever greater liberty and enlightenment, culminating in modern forms of liberal democracy and constitutional monarchy.

<sup>31</sup> The Warsaw expat Anglo-Polish world is small and often rather insular in its preoccupations. One well-known figure often spoke of making fish out of fish soup, inverting Lech Wałęsa’s claim in the 1990s that it was easier to make fish soup (communism) from fish (pre-war Poland) than it was to make fish (democracy) from fish soup. There often also appears to be a rather possessive attitude towards the Old Country among some second or third generation British Poles in particular who have often been instilled with endless anticommunist rhetoric and a desire to make Poland more like Britain (or a small part of it, between Oxford, Cambridge, and the City of London). Those, on the other hand, who enter this insular world with little or no familial baggage tend to encounter such cabals of gentleman. A Scottish journalist in Warsaw at one of the news wires became well-known as someone who resolved this situation by persuading himself and others, not always successfully, that he had become more Polish than the Polish. Journalists generally aim to make the news make sense to editors who might know little about Poland. But they also rub shoulders with the bankers, lawyers, advisers, press officers, and others in that small Warsaw bubble. And in my experience at least of there are many egregious examples of media blindness. A well-known ex-*Dow Jones Newswires* chief who talked of “markets being like gravity” is one example. While *The Financial Times* quite clearly has a financial audience at heart, some of what one might call its social reporting was actually very good, but still a little blinded to discussions that questioned some of the mythological shibboleths stemming from Brussels and the City of London.

made it so.<sup>32</sup> Most Poles in the business world will probably go along with that, if that is the prevailing ideology as they understand it: not one set in stone, sacrosanct, and untouchable, but good enough.

The Warsaw expat bubble is thus, we discover, pretty far removed from ordinary Polish lives. That much appears standard in most foreign reporting. Warsaw-based interlocutors with ministers, business people, and so on are also needed, after all. But its seeming lack of self-reflection and curiosity wrapped in ostensibly objective news reporting grates against a Poland that is now rearing its head in the form of PiS and others. This apparently “other” Poland, like the “other” UK after Brexit, is often seen as a relic of the past, a place of backwardness, or perhaps failure. Rarely, it seems, do reporters take the time to glimpse into this world unless through loaded eyes—via a mixed bag of labels used loosely and often interchangeably: the transition’s losers, the marginalized, rural, populist, Catholic, nationalist, backward, elderly, provincial, *Polska A* and *Polska B*.<sup>33</sup> These labels are rarely explored and often float uncontested in a sea of textual associations and signifiers signifying nothing but other signifiers, merely acting to reinforce each other, partly through omission, partly through underlying shared archetypes that rest on one central assumption: the “real” Eastern Europe equals backwardness.<sup>34</sup> If unchallenged, they become precisely the products that the news industry can sell, often with a little discursive wink and nod.

<sup>32</sup> The Washington Consensus was a set of economic policy prescriptions constituting the “standard” reform package promoted for crisis-wracked developing countries by Washington, D.C.-based institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and the U.S. Treasury Department. Poland’s first post-communist finance minister, Leszek Balcerowicz, and US economist Jeffrey Sachs were responsible for the so-called Shock Therapy program that was the basis for moving from the state-dependent model to a free market in 1990–91.

<sup>33</sup> *Polska A/Polska B* (Poland A/Poland B) became popular bywords for those areas—*Polska A*—that mainly had been under Prussian (German) domination in the west (more industrialized, urban, developed) and those in the east that had been under Russian rule during the partitions until 1918—*Polska B*. See M. Kozak, A. Pyszkowski, and R. Szewczyk, eds. *Słownik Rozwoju Regionalnego* (Warsaw: PARR, 2001).

<sup>34</sup> James Shotter and Evon Huber in Warsaw, and Arthur Beesley “Poland’s Drift ‘Backwards and to the East’ Puts EU on Alert,” *The Financial Times*, July 20, 2017. “Law and Justice’s reforms are a denial of European values and standards and put our reputation at risk. They’re transporting us—politically—in time and space: backwards and to the East,” said Donald Tusk, the former Polish prime minister and bitter rival of Mr. Kaczynski who is now president of the European Council.”

In turn, the reaction to this externally imposed and internally—only partially and then often grudgingly—accepted onslaught of the modern world and its media foot soldiers at the *Financial Times* and the *Economist* has been expressed within Poland in some quarters as a kind of raw nativism, often lazily labeled as populism. This conceptualization regards Poland as an exception, or, if anything pan-national, perhaps part of a Slavic or Central European model,<sup>35</sup> and one that combines large doses of authoritarian social conservatism, religious teaching, and a protective and benevolent state.

The Polish media meanwhile often seems to reflect a more widely perceived method of dealing with threat and occupation: self-protection necessitates a strategy of ingratiation—finding a mode of communication that shows respect for, and recognition of, the order of things, i.e., of the new occupier—often concealing thinly veiled disdain. In turn, this, of course, has an effect in terms of how the news is produced. The Western reporter may not even see the ways in which he is being manipulated and becomes partisan, vain, and incurious, often without even realizing it. The layered meanings become two dimensional, and controlled understandings fill the gaps.

The Other, as it were, thus works both ways: if PiS divides the world into Us and Them, then the expat media pack tends to divide Poland into Those with PiS and Those with Us.

But this is only the beginning of the problems. The things the Western reporter sees and writes down are ostensibly true, objectively reported, and widely agreed upon, both in Poland and elsewhere. Suggesting that PiS is a more complex beast and that Polish society—like all others—is not amenable to simple dichotomies does not preclude the possibility that what they report has much truth to it, but only so far. If one chooses to look closer, one sees that the “neither East, nor West, neither left, nor right” narrative has been an ongoing feature of Polish public discourse since the 1930s *Endecja*<sup>36</sup> period,

<sup>35</sup> George Friedman, “Hungary, Poland and Illiberal Democracy,” *Geopolitical futures*, March 18, 2016.

<sup>36</sup> *Endecja*: National Democracy (*Narodowa Demokracja*, also known from its abbreviation *ND* as “*Endecja*”) was a Polish political movement active from the second half of the nineteenth century until the end of the Second Polish Republic (1939). Created to promote the struggle for Poland’s sovereignty, the movement acquired its right-wing nationalist character following the return to independence in 1918. A founder and its



throughout the communist period when nationalism returned to vogue after 1956 and again in 1968, and it now seems to be reawakening under PiS.

### WHAT KIND OF DEMOCRACY, IF ANY?

PiS could represent the first step towards what the transition paradigm terms a form of hybrid democracy.<sup>37</sup> Not every political liberalization necessarily leads to Western-style democracy, after all, as the Arab Spring illustrates. In many cases we have witnessed the emergence of so-called “hybrid regimes”—semi-authoritarianisms or electoral authoritarianisms<sup>38</sup> that also include competitive authoritarianisms,<sup>39</sup> new authoritarianisms,<sup>40</sup> or neo-authoritarianisms.<sup>41</sup> These regimes should be located between liberal democracies and “old” authoritarian regimes, and perhaps PiS’s vision, if not yet the reality, lies somewhere here.<sup>42</sup>

Marina Ottaway, for example, characterizes hybrid or semi-authoritarian regimes as “ambiguous systems that combine rhetorical acceptance of liberal democracy, the existence of some formal democratic institutions, and respect for a limited sphere of civil and political liber-

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principal ideologue was Roman Dmowski. Later, the ND’s focus shifted to countering what it saw as Polish-Jewish economic competition with Catholic Poles. During the interbellum Second Republic, the ND was a strong proponent for the Polonization of the country’s German minority and of other non-Polish (chiefly Ukrainian and Belarusian) populations in Poland’s eastern border regions (Kresy).

<sup>37</sup> Thomas Carothers, “The end of the Transition Paradigm,” *Journal of Democracy*, 13, no. 1 (2002): 5–21.

<sup>38</sup> Andreas Schedler, “Elections Without Democracy: The Menu of Manipulation,” *Journal of Democracy*, 13, no. 2 (2002): 36–50.

<sup>39</sup> Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism,” *Journal of Democracy*, 13, no. 2 (2002): 5–66.

<sup>40</sup> Stephen J. King, *The New Authoritarianism In the Middle East and North Africa* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009).

<sup>41</sup> Laura Guazzone and Daniela Pioppi, “Interpreting Change in the Arab world,” in *The Arab State and Neo-Liberal Globalisation: The Restructuring of State Power in the Middle East*, eds. Laura Guazzone and Daniela Pioppi (Cairo: AUC Press, 2009), 1–15.

<sup>42</sup> W. Aniol, “A Social Deficit: Poland in the Face of Developmental Challenges in the 2010s,” *Problemy Polityki Społecznej*, 31, no. 4 (2013): 39–56; V. Chadwick, V. “Putin-like?” Not Us, Say Poland and Hungary in Response to Bill Clinton,” *Politico*, May 17, 2016. Retrieved from <http://www.politico.eu/article/us-democracy-putin-like-not-us-say-poland-and-hungary-in-response-to-bill-clinton/>; J. Rupnik, J. “Hungary’s Illiberal Turn: How Things Went Wrong,” *Journal of Democracy* 23, no. 3 (July 2012): 132–37.



ties with essentially illiberal or even authoritarian traits. This ambiguous character, furthermore, is deliberate. Semi-authoritarian systems are not imperfect democracies struggling toward improvement and consolidation but regimes determined to maintain the appearance of democracy without exposing themselves to the political risks that free competition entails.”<sup>43</sup>

Some in Poland have gone further, arguing that these are forms of “dictatorships” that have modernized themselves, not through the application of direct oppression but the use of the “velvet fist” of cultural—ideological or discursive—hegemony in which the dominant narrative plays a central role. As Adam Michnik has noted: “After the velvet revolutions the time has come for the velvet dictatorships.”<sup>44</sup> In this way, they do not use “hard power”—open oppression and direct means of eliminating the opposition—but the sophisticated indirect means of “soft power” for the legitimation and consolidation of the “illiberal democracy.”<sup>45</sup>

#### THE MORE THINGS CHANGE, THE MORE THEY STAY THE SAME

Perhaps the key question is whether Poland has actually changed or if PiS reflects a set of societal values that have remained largely unchanged but publicly latent. This is a sphere not apparently occupied only by nationalist football hooligans, as much of the media rhetoric might have it, but one in which “habitus” is occupied—peopled—by neighbors, friends, work colleagues, family and even spouses. When pushed, these might also betray a quiet predilection for Polish exceptionalism, even if only at a micro level, when disparaging the over-liberalism of English attitudes to child rearing, Germans’ tolerance of the so-called *Multi-Kulti* society, or American commercialism, for example. These values tend to be less informed by secular and multi-

<sup>43</sup> Marina Ottaway, *Democracy Challenged. The Rise of Semi-Authoritarianism* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003), 3–11.

<sup>44</sup> “The Bitter Taste of Velvet Dictatorship,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, October 17, 2015 (published also in Hungarian, see *Élet és Irodalom*, *Budapest Weekly*, November 13, 2015).

<sup>45</sup> G. Polyák, “The Hungarian Media System: Stopping Short or Re-Transformation?” Special Issue, Hungary’s Path Toward an Illiberal System, *Südosteuropa* 63, no. 2 (2015): 272–318.

cultural influences, and while not overtly fueled by a sense of inward looking patriotism, there is a clear and strong sense that “what we do is the best way of doing things.” Laced with Catholic values in relation to the family, women’s rights, homosexuality, and other areas, it is a formidable agent of social control.

PART I

# ESSAYS ON $\pi$ S



## NEVER MIND THE BOLEKS!<sup>1</sup>

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JO HARPER

There is nothing either inevitable or arbitrary about the return of the Law and Justice (PiS) party in 2014 and 2015, winning as it did both presidential and parliamentary elections after eight years in opposition and in apparent gradual decline; a party seemingly comprised of the post-1989 transformation's losers, grumbling, marginalized and perhaps most significantly, ageing.

Contingent factors certainly coalesced, from the electoral collapse of the postcommunist Left, to the apparent political disappearance and ideological capitulation of the secular intelligentsia wing of Solidarity, and, to some extent, the exit of Prime Minister Donald Tusk, the founder and head of Civic Platform (PO), to Brussels in late 2014 to become President of the European Council. This left PO effectively rudderless, more prone to scandal and inter-personal conflict, and at times willing to abrogate the free-market ideology that seemed to have assured it a hegemonic position both at home, electorally, and within the political-economic nexus of Warsaw-Brussels after 2007.

However, in some crucial respects, the return of PiS cannot wholly be thought of as a return. It speaks to a set of forces that had been grinding away below the surface of public life since 1989, and of unfinished business. PiS was never not there, in other words.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In February 2016, investigators from the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) in Warsaw revealed documents taken from the home of the last communist-era interior minister, General Czesław Kiszczak, including a letter from 1970 signed with Lech Wałęsa's codename "Bolek," in which Bolek apparently commits to providing information. Reference pays homage to the Sex Pistols.

<sup>2</sup> For example the Confederation for an Independent Poland, KPN, operated on the basis that the 1989 negotiated transfer of power had been a pact between reformist communists and the secular wing of Solidarity.

So, in the almost three decades since the 1989 Round Table<sup>3</sup> talks that initiated the process of de-communization in Poland and Eastern Europe, the main contenders for power were still trawling through history to make contemporary points. This was history as a lived and heavily political experience. The language used by contenders for power had itself become fused with historical references and entangled in contemporary politics, ideological narratives, and policy and political platforms. History here was not really about the past at all, but is a daily lived and vivid present. What we observe, therefore, is a kind of phenomenology of the past expressed in current political discourse.

### IN THE BEGINNING

PO and PiS are, in many ways, children of the crucial period when the Solidarity movement arose in the 1980s and then broke apart in the 1990s. Since 2001, their often petty wrangling, disputes, name-calling, ideological, and political predilections—and their different understandings and uses of history—have marked and been marked at every stage and turn by the various unresolved questions of post-1989 Polish public life: if and how to account for the past?; what version of the future and vision of society is desired?; and how do and how should economies work? What we have observed is a long and very drawn out struggle over symbolic succession: who will inherit the mantle of the Solidarity movement of the 1980s? One child appears to veer towards the European mainstream and the other stays much closer to home. Or that is how it has been largely written, in particular from afar, in the Western press and elsewhere. We need to unravel the story a bit, and this chapter is an attempt to do that.

The focus here is mainly on the post-2001 period, following the electoral failure of an influential post-Solidarity centrist party, Freedom

<sup>3</sup> Krzysztof Dubiński, *Magdalenka, Transakcja Epoki* (Warsaw: BGW 1990). The talks and the apparently equivocal nature of the deal agreed upon (with “real” power deals seen to have been brokered behind the scenes between the elites from both camps at Magdalenka, near Warsaw, during pre-Round Table talks starting in the Autumn of 1988) have been a central symbolic component of a great deal of nationalist rhetoric since 1989, evoking accusations of betrayal, treachery, unfinished business, moral compromise, and more. See also Konstanty Gebert, *Mebel* (London: Aneks, 1990).

Union (UW), a precursor of PO. UW's electoral collapse in 2001 and subsequent political marginalization opened up a new phase, one marked by a shift of the center-right to the right and the emergence of a clearer dichotomy between a "harder" (PiS) and "softer" (PO) right-of-center discourse in Poland.

In many ways, the buckle that held the post-Round Table political consensus together ended in the early 2000s and permitted the unleashing of a more clearly defined national oriented discourse that sought, openly and dogmatically, to break up what it saw—and still sees—as the tainted (post-1989) Third Republic, which grew out of the compromises of the—flawed—Round Table agreement of 1989. PO's and PiS's respective versions of the transition, from the narrow empirical to the broader historical-interpretive, furnish the main outlines of the central discursive schism in Poland. They give it a voice and provide the faces and an identifiable form and political existence, precisely the things the Western press sees and writes about.

After the split within the Solidarity movement in the early 1990s (the so-called "War at the Top"), some foetal elements of the ideological and discursive divisions on the center-right that were to emerge after 2001 started to become more visible.<sup>4</sup> But for a while, they were largely subsumed under the banner of the Solidarity Election Campaign (AWS) umbrella party that won the 1997 election and was ousted four years later by a resurgent postcommunist Left headed by the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD).<sup>5</sup> It was not until the 2005 election, four years after they were both established, that the two parties emerged as more or less clearly identifiable representatives of competing narrative interpretations of the same ideological patch and discursive space in Polish public life and political thought. The liberal market, ostensibly the secular and international PO, was up against the conservative, Church-supported, and nationalist PiS.

<sup>4</sup> Following the June 1989 parliamentary elections, Wałęsa, disappointed that some of his former fellow campaigners were still governing alongside former communists, decided to run for the newly re-established office of president.

<sup>5</sup> After Solidarity split in 1991, some parties later regrouped around Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS), formed in 1996 as a coalition of over thirty parties. In 1997, Freedom Union (UW) joined it in a brief and turbulent coalition, until 1999. PO was founded in 2001 by Andrzej Olechowski, Maciej Płażyński, and Donald Tusk. In 2005, it won 24.1 percent of the vote, second to PiS's 27 percent.

This is a fashionable dichotomy, and it easily fits into the media news cycles and narrative assumptions underpinning them. It is also one that holds some water, although not without certain empirical leaks. After the left imploded and social-democratic impulses effectively waned with the demise of UW, the central choice that emerged, it seems, was between a version of postcommunism that accentuated economic liberalism and one that emphasized the power of the nation.

The political discourses of both PO—the larger of the two governing coalition parties (with the Polish Peoples' Party or PSL) from 2007 to 2015—and PiS—which has governed since October 2015 and was also in coalition with smaller parties from 2005 until 2007—have defined the central cleavage in Poland since 2005.<sup>6</sup> The Kukiz'15<sup>7</sup> and Nowoczesna parties<sup>8</sup> have joined the fray, but for the time being, neither offers much more than revamped or exaggerated versions of the main discursive cleavage.

Sociologically much has been made in this apparently post-ideological (left-right) age of PO and PiS seeking to articulate the voices and latch on to the votes of a changing Polish society, with the former articulating many of the demands of an emerging, mainly urban, middle class that is more materialistic than previous generations, more open to Europe (in a wider and narrower sense), more educated, more affluent, and more aspirational, and the latter representing those of an older constituency, often more rural, less affluent, more closely linked to the land and to tradition. At least that is the narrative journalists tend to follow, and it makes it easier to explain how it is possible for

<sup>6</sup> Łukasz Orylski, *Evolution of Polish Political Discourse after September 2005* (Gdańsk: Uniwersytet Gdański, 2006); Krzysztof Tyszka, "Dialogic Society—the Crisis of Social Communication in Poland," *Polish Sociological Review* 3, no. 163 (2008): 456–476. The works of Norman Fairclough, e.g., *Language and Power*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 2001), and Teun A. van Dijk, *Communicating Racism: Ethnic Prejudice in Thought and Talk* (London: Sage, 1987), are of particular use in this respect. See also Elżbieta Halas, "Symbolic Politics of Public Time and Collective Memory: The Polish Case," *European Review* 10, no. 1 (2002): 115–29.

<sup>7</sup> Paweł Kukiz is a Polish singer and leader of Kukiz'15, a political party campaigning for single-member districts, and a candidate in the 2015 presidential election, in which he received 21 percent of the votes in the first round of the elections, finishing third.

<sup>8</sup> *Nowoczesna* (Modern) is a liberal political party in Poland founded by the economist Ryszard Petru in late May 2015. It won 7.6 percent of votes in the 2015 parliamentary election, which resulted in its winning twenty-eight seats in Sejm. In August 2015 the party's name was changed to Modern (*Nowoczesna*).



an ostensibly Westernizing country to so apparently turn its back on “Western values.”

But PiS often deploys a language that is closer to social democracy, or perhaps a cruder statism: the protection of the old, pensioners, traditional industries, a strong state-based health and pension system, for example. It wraps up what is, therefore, in many ways a call for things not to change, for the state to remain an important allocator of collective resources, in a language of patriotism and populism rooted in a well understood, often rather covertly articulated discourse of “us” versus “them.” The “us” is clean, decent, honest, hard-working Poles, invariably Catholics, who are manipulated, lied to, and betrayed by a combination of mythically constructed “Others” (the “them”), both inner and outer: “liberals,” “communists,” urban elites, foreign investors, and others.

#### ORIGINAL SINS: THE ROUND TABLE

PiS came to power in 2005 under the banner of a “moral revolution.” It claimed it was necessary to bring about a “Fourth Republic” to replace the existing (post-1989) Third Republic and which, according to the PiS narrative, had failed and was tainted by “*układy*.” This Polish term does not lend itself to easy translation into English, but it refers to a nebulous series of networks, as PiS constructs them, of semi-covert groups operating in a half-world comprised of (mainly ex-communist) politicians and secret service officials and apparatchiks, and which grew up as a direct consequence of the Round Table deal between the communists and intellectual-liberal wing of Solidarity.

PiS’s narrative is held together by the defining myth—the original sin if you like—of the Round Table, endowing it with a mythical significance and setting it up as the origin of all the postcommunist period’s ills. The PiS narrative critique of the Round Table perhaps finds no better discursive instrument than in the term “*układy*.”

“*Układy*” neatly define and reproduce the party’s rhetorical devices in particular in relation to “enemies” and reinforce the powerful “us” and “them” discourse discussed elsewhere in this volume. This is mythical, almost magical, thinking; enemies, everywhere but invis-

ible, a kind of ritual discursive evocation of evil. As well as the ex-communists, secret service agents and other PiS undesirables, leader Jarosław Kaczyński (and before his death in 2010, his twin brother and then-president Lech) has also located PO firmly within its “układy” discursive sights. Donald Tusk, for example, was personally held responsible for the Smoleńsk tragedy of 2010.<sup>9</sup>

This is a discourse that speaks to a particular national tradition, evoking a certain strand of that tradition, one that divides the world into “good” and “bad.” It is a mode of political thought and action that also places the Catholic Church at the heart of the concept of the nation and Catholic Poles, by extension, at the center of the national identity and PiS as the party of the Catholic faithful and families. The discourse plays on an old set of grievances: a nation that sees itself as governed by foreigners or their local proxies; a society divided against itself, stripped of the power to define itself.

The PiS attack on the Round Table agreement and what it refers to as “pathological networks” that stemmed directly from it, finds a direct discursive link to the present in the process of lustration: cleansing. Since the first days of the postcommunist era, voices on the nationalist right have called for a national accounting of what it calls “crimes of the communist period,” to open the official files and allow the legal process to take its course.

“Cleansing” is, of course, a heavily loaded political metaphor, implying there is dirt to clean up and implicitly equating dirt with “the Other,” i.e., not “us.” It also puts the onus on the dirty to prove their innocence, to show how clean they are, or in other words, how like

<sup>9</sup> Smoleńsk: On April 10, 2010, an aircraft of the Polish Air Force crashed near the city of Smoleńsk in Russia killing all ninety-six people on board, including the president of Poland, Lech Kaczyński, the chief of the Polish General Staff and other senior Polish military officers, president of the National Bank of Poland, and senior members of the Polish clergy. The group was to attend an event marking the seventieth anniversary of the massacre at Katyń, which took place not far from Smoleńsk. Both the Russian and Polish official investigations found no technical faults with the aircraft. Various conspiracy theories about the crash have since been in circulation and are promoted by senior political figures in Poland. Jarosław Kaczyński also attacked people who attended an anti-government demonstration in January 2016, saying: “It’s as if some people had it in their genes, the worst sort of Poles, who are now most active as they sense a threat.” He added that they followed a “horrid tradition of national treason.” See Jo Harper, “Negating negation,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 57, no. 4 (2010): III–24.

“us” they are. It presupposes that “we” are clean and that our concept of cleanliness is the superior, if not the only, one. It found a rather ugly expression in Kaczyński’s equation of refugees from the Middle East with disease in mid-2015.

This would, the discourse implies, sweep through the corridors of power, undermining the bureaucratic and political underpinnings of these corrupt networks, that element of the postcommunist reality most despised by PiS. The discourse stamps a restrictive framework on a complex and multi-layered debate. But it appears to be a central feature of the PiS tactics of dividing the world into those who support lustration, and therefore the PiS “project,” and those who do not, and are therefore “on the other side,” and, in effect, complicit in the communists’ dirty compromise.

#### THE CHURCH—AN ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

The Church sustains its own balancing act in a Polish society that is slowly declining in religiosity among younger people but yet still holds tight the hand that has guided the nation for so long.

PiS may, at times, sounds like the political wing of the Church in Poland, as if it needed one. But focusing on its pulpit catechisms and eschatology, which appear to constitute an element of PiS’s hybrid form of legitimation, is liable to blind one to the diversity of opinion within the Church, within PiS, and the groups between PiS and the Church hierarchy. The diachronic and the synchronic are, in effect, collapsed into one another. When PiS speaks, by default at times, it intrinsically has to mouth a script written elsewhere.

The PiS version of Polish historiography illustrates this well. It is seemingly made up of timeless, unchanging values and moral certainties in which the diachronic meaning will always—apparently—trump the synchronic. Reality is altered to meet moral imperatives, starting with history and cleansing narratives, an almost Stalinist exercise in rearranging facts and erasing persons. It is closed, self-referential, and confirmed via the power of internal logic and rhetoric. PiS calls for things to never to change, an ahistorical view of the world, which essentially dooms to failure all secular choices. It is a discourse spoken as

if merely a proxy for the Church; it is full of certainty, good and bad, evil and shame, friends and enemies, community, traditional norms, family, gender and reproduction, and against secular institutions. It calls for the Church to be embedded in the constitution and in social policy, and demands that heroic death and immortality define Poland's self-image.

But the real world—an area of signification that exists beyond what and how we name it—goes on. And this necessitates a series of logical and rhetorical balancing acts by PiS. The signified, in other words, must be brought into the line with the pre-written signifiers. When the doctrine does not tell one what to say, feel or think on any given moment, however, that is when problems arise and potential for insight emerges. Three key cases stand out here.

The first is that of the historian Jan Gross and his work on massacres of Jews by their Catholic Polish neighbors at Jedwabne during World War Two. In 2016 when Education Minister Anna Zalewska questioned if Poles had participated in the murder of hundreds of their Jewish neighbors, eyebrows were not raised as high as perhaps they would have before PiS came to power, given that the party is determined to reconstruct certain elements of popular public historiography, starting with the war. Inconvenient facts cannot, it seems, derail the narrative of PiS, whose standard evocation is—as we have noted—one of Polish cleanliness, the kind of symbolic, holy, purity that brooks no compromise.

The second is the April 2010 plane crash at Smoleńsk. PiS has sought to portray ex-president Lech Kaczyński as a man of historical significance, and many in the party believe his death in a 2010 air crash believe was not an accident. Rather than having “died” like a civilian in an accident, he is referred to as having “fallen” like a soldier in battle.

The third is Bolek: the figure of Lech Wałęsa has provided a fertile terrain for PiS discourse, allowing it to (attempt to) requisition the anticommunist struggle, to possess it symbolically, downplaying and attacking Wałęsa's role and contribution.<sup>10</sup> Wałęsa is constructed dis-

<sup>10</sup> A book by Sławomir Cenckiewicz and Piotr Gontarczyk, *SB a Lech Wałęsa: przyczynek do biografii* (Merlin: Warsaw, 2008), showed that previously unknown documents indicated that Wałęsa had had contact with the security services (SB) at the start of the 1970s. Wałęsa as “Bolek” first appeared in 1992 in the so-called “Macierewicz List.” In

cursively as having jumped into the fray (and literally over the wall of the shipyards in 1980, another powerful symbolic association) over the heads of the established underground opposition, and quickly acquiring a cult status that made him indispensable to the movement.

All three elements, almost by a magical alchemy, bring together and then juggle the notions of foreign intervention (and hence the need for domestic unity and self-protection) and domestic betrayal. The PiS narrative can also be characterized not only as stubbornly anti-Russian, but equivocal on the EU. Russia, PiS knows, tends to evoke negative societal reactions and has strong associations with the war and its aftermath. Anti-Russian rhetoric also cements calls for emboldened arms deals and NATO security measures. The party's anti-EU and anti-Russian discourses echo traditional fears about the loss of sovereignty, however real or imagined they may be.

#### ARE WE THERE YET?

The split that was subsequently to see the birth of PO and PiS in 2001 was a marginal feature of postcommunist politics in the 1990s. Infighting in the Solidarity movement was an intermittently vexing sideshow to the re-emergence of the postcommunist left, SLD, and the slow emergence of a more clearly defined and organized extreme nationalist and populist right.

But since 2005, this powerful dichotomy of PO versus PiS has emerged, grounded in a series of shifts in Polish sociopolitics: one, the success of the far-right and populist parties at the 2005 election and their subsequent collapse at the 2007 election; two, the collapse of the postcommunist left; and three, the marginalization of the smaller center-right predecessor of PO, UW. The elections of 2001, 2005, 2007, 2011, and 2015 thus see a shift away from the two extremes of left and right (however troublesome that ideological distinction has become) and the emergence of a new political center, although it shifted decidedly to the right, and was devoid of many of the ideological and

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2000, a court ruled that he had not been an agent of the SB. "Lech Kaczyński: Wałęsa był 'Bolkciem,'" *Dziennik*, June 5, 2008.

personnel cleavages that marked the earlier phase of the postcommunist transition.

#### **THE BRIEF RISE AND FALL OF EXTREMISM, 2005–7**

At the 2007 election, the League of Polish Families (LPR) and Self Defense (SO) failed to re-enter parliament after two years in coalition with PiS, and PiS picked up much of their electorate. While LPR and SO's constituencies differed quite significantly, as did their discursive formulations and political strategies, a combination of the nationalist messianism of LPR discourses and the bottom-up populism of SO is what an unreconstructed PiS discourse might look like: on the one hand, a hard-line call for a moral purge of the ills, as it sees them, stemming from both communism and postcommunist liberalism, and on the other, a strong and "fair" state. These SO and LPR discourses briefly appeared to herald the dawning of a new rightward shift (without PiS at the center of it) after their electoral successes in 2005.

#### **THE LEFT LOSES ITS VOICE**

In the early 1990s, SLD—then based around the Social Democracy of the Polish Republic (SdRP), a smaller party at the core of SLD—was quietly able to shed much of its communist heritage and focus on secular issues where popular disaffections ran high, such as health, education, abortion rights, and the separation of church and state. It portrayed itself as a modernizing force, while still upholding the ideal of social justice and its recognizable identity as part of a secular left tradition. In 1995, the co-founder of the SdRP, Aleksander Kwaśniewski, became president, and by the elections of 2001, SLD had what appeared to be powerful political appeal. By the time of its election victory in 2001, it seemed to have succeeded in doing two apparently contradictory things: positioning itself simultaneously as a protector of the underdog and as a natural party of government. But once in power after 2001, it appeared to have no coherent worldview, an identity crisis manifested in contradictory impulses and policies, or

a lack of policies. It lurched to the left and back to the right and in the process, it lost any symbolic historical terrain it may have occupied.

The postcommunists' fall from (a highly conditional and societally segmented) grace—like many other social-democratic parties in Europe—centered on a lack of vision and alternatives, which was seen by some as a continuation of the PZPR and by others as a sop to neoliberalism. On a personnel level, the postcommunist Left was also destroying itself, with several high profile figures that had risen in the aftermath of (and, in the case of Leszek Miller and Kwaśniewski, thanks to) the Round Table negotiations caught up in a series of corruption allegations, reinforcing the party's drifting ideological references.

#### THE SECULAR CENTER FADES AWAY

Another important stepping-stone towards the rise of the new center-right was the demise of the old center-right. The 2001 electoral eclipse of Freedom Union (UW), the successor of the Democratic Union (UD), a party that had grown out of the rump of the Workers' Defense Committee (KOR), which as the underground opposition group in the 1980s, in alliance with the reformed trade union-based AWS in 1997–2001, also undermined one of the key dimensions of the Round Table agreement. Namely, it weakened the stabilizing role played by the mainly Warsaw-based intelligentsia,<sup>11</sup> both secular and Catholic, centered around KOR.

<sup>11</sup> Adam Michnik, "On the Side of Geremek," *New York Review of Books*, Sept. 28, 2008. Bronisław Geremek was the leader of UW and a key figure in the underground opposition movement in the 1980s. He died in 2008 in a car accident. Geremek held rather traditionally conservative social values, including opposition to the dilution of Poland's abortion laws in 2005. Geremek was the central figure among the Warsaw-based intellectuals, playing a key role in bridging some of the gaps, cementing the worker/intellectual alliance, articulating a common voice and then in the post-1989 era a modestly centrist politics, drawing on some of the secular and liberal elements of a tradition with very weak roots in Poland: social-democracy. Geremek's death, and the ageing of many of the core leaders of KOR and UD, symbolized the end of KOR's role in holding together the post-Round Table political compact. However, UW's identity crisis and Geremek's poor leadership, including his failure to support Olechowski, meant that UW had already lost its political role much earlier. It failed to bridge key social gaps or reshape the central narrative, and when it failed electorally in 2001, its strategy of co-opting the elites of larger political for-

In one sense, this small group of ex-activists acted to temper many of the more radical and revolutionary elements of the Solidarity movement (and for some, to stymie any genuinely revolutionary impulses). It spoke to and for Solidarity, directed the mass movement in its relations with the communist authorities while developing a narrative of legal-rationality and peaceful opposition to the communist system, and thus, by extension, also a peaceful and negotiated transition away from communism in 1989.

It is here, however, that the problems start. Many in the Solidarity camp in 1989 saw a cohesive entity in the “Warsaw intellectuals” and in the earlier flirtations of many of them (most obviously Jacek Kuroń and Adam Michnik) with Marxism. In some of the more hard-line nationalist quarters—and in less hard-line quarters too, they were seen as untrustworthy and prepared to make deals with the communist authorities and ditch their base support in the movement.

The “liberal” intelligentsia, according to one PiS narrative, betrayed its base, “ordinary” Poles. But it is also interestingly opaque in this area, however, given that many of this group of intellectuals and “liberals” were of Jewish origin. This included Michnik, the editor of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, which started its life as Solidarity’s election campaign paper in May 1989, and whose “liberalism” has been the subject of PiS scorn since the acrimonious Solidarity break-up in the early 1990s. Kaczyński has been openly critical of anti-Semitism in Poland, but a discursive bundling of popular associations that clearly fall within a recognizably Endecja discourse of enemies of “Catholic Poland” in all their various guises (communists, socialists, Jews, liberals, masons), responsible for undermining national cohesion, quietly plays on the ethno-nationalist myth that links communists and Jews, and sees both as intrinsically non-Polish, and perhaps even anti-Polish.<sup>12</sup>

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mations such as Solidarity and later AWS also fell apart. This generated another precondition for PO and PiS’s hegemonic rise.

<sup>12</sup> See Jarosław Kurski’s *Lech Wałęsa: Democrat or Dictator?* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993). On page 44, Kurski describes one occasion in the early 1990s when Lech Wałęsa felt he had been let down by some members of the Solidarity Citizens’ Committee and said: “I believed in my friends—Jews—and they made a fool out of me. I was warned many times not to get involved with Jews, that I should not get into their circle and take their advice. I always answered that they were my friends, colleagues. So, what happened? They worked me over. Now I won’t let them manipulate me again.” Wałęsa is quoted elsewhere in the book, after being asked about allegations of his own anti-Semi-



The post-1989 political landscape until 2001 and the electoral marginalization of UW saw these “Warsaw intellectuals” take leading positions in the government and the opposition. But their largely secular discourse, one framed, on the one hand, by a neoliberal discourse of “Shock Therapy,” and on the other, by calls to lay the past to rest (including the “Thick Line”) was never broadly appealing enough to consolidate its electoral support. Furthermore, its language of historical reconciliation also alienated a large chunk of the Solidarity movement that had wanted to seize power in 1989. In fact, the more Poland was forced to face up to past horrors, in particular inter-ethnic animosities in the 1930s and during the war, the more the Warsaw intelligentsia could be portrayed as “not one of us” in PiS’s emerging nationalist/populist discourse.

The rise of the Committee for the Defense of Democracy (KOD) in late 2015, in many ways, fills this void. But in many other ways, it has not replaced the liberal intelligentsia’s historical sense of itself as playing a leading role in speaking on behalf of the nation.

The victory of PiS in September 2015 was also, to a large extent, a function of the rapid implosion of PO after Tusk’s departure to Brussels in late 2014. The new premier, Ewa Kopacz never had much time to secure her position with all of the infighting and squabbles inside of the party. The plundering of pensions in 2014 also confirmed a drift away from the party’s liberal economic image. There were also arbitrary uses of state power in sweeps of *Wprost*, some seemingly deliberate last minute appointments to the Constitutional Tribunal prior to leaving office, and a sense that the party had lost its way and was just as prone to cronyism and corruption as it had accused PiS of being.

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tism [a reference to Geremek as an “egg-head”]: “At almost all the press conferences I would be handed a few scraps of paper with anonymous questions that had an anti-Semitic flavor.” Here is a mild example: “Millions of Poles are waiting for the answer, when will you finally expel all the European-Jews from the Citizens’ Parliamentary Caucus and the government?”

## CONCLUSIONS

Narrative is a rather over-used word, with journalists now falling over themselves to use it. But for all that, it does to help us to understand PiS as a “project,” another term that has lost some of its initial heuristic appeal. The references may, of course, be random, used willy-nilly, tossed around according to personal taste, circumstance, or contingent, solely for immediate political gain. But that would be strange and lacking in empirical accuracy. The PiS narrative is clearly not dissimilar to that of many insurgent movements. It brings together existing, and spawns new discourses that combine conspiracy theories of corrupt elites, betrayal, and notions of purity, with the Church providing a rhetorical moral spine. The Church clearly also plays a powerful role on issues such as abortion and IVF. It provides a language of suffering, death, and sacrifice. If Smoleńsk and the Round Table provide the discursive furniture, then actors such as Wałęsa—or *Bolek*—occupy the most prominent seats.

But at the same time one needs to understand that PiS is also, in some crucial ways, a reaction to the failure of the Left, with a market economy disadvantaging many and the lack of an alternative to the Church’s version of civil society. PiS offers an ideology that harkens back to community, jobs, and decidedly not to emigration. It defines the nation in narrow terms, evoking enemies, both real and imagined, everywhere, which in turn evokes the *Endecja* period. PiS also seems to have learned some lessons from 2005–7. Its economic policies regarding banks, foreign investors, wind power, energy, and Russia and its fight with the European Commission all play into the narrative of Polish exceptionalism. In this understanding, PiS is a response to the crisis, not a cause of it. It, thus, offers quasi-leftism with a touch of religion, conspiracy theory and law and order. History never ends in this politics of symbols, in fact, it must be resurrected and relived permanently.

## **PIS: THE END OF THE BEGINNING**

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ANDRZEJ RYCHARD

Since October 2015, Poland has been changing, and the changes perhaps concern not only questions of current policy but also the fundamental direction of development.

In my view, the political defeat of the previous ruling party, Civic Platform (PO), resulted from the exhaustion of a certain model of politics and not just from political errors. Unfortunately, perhaps, the model of politics implemented by Law and Justice (PiS) is laden with greater errors, which will be analyzed. Among other factors, this model is marked by some incompatibilities between its goals and the means applied.

This essay is an attempt to set out hypothetical answers to the question posed in the title. I begin from what has happened and how the defeat of PO and the success of PiS—both in the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2015—may be interpreted. These are the most important political events defining today's reality. They help one posit hypotheses concerning the possible systemic consequences of what has happened.

**WHAT HAPPENED IN FALL 2015 AND WHY?<sup>1</sup>**

PO's defeat in the parliamentary elections, governing in alliance with the Polish Peoples' Party (PSL), was, to a large extent, the result of losing the presidential election a little earlier. In other words, the defeat in the parliamentary election was the child of the presidential election, which does not mean that it was not possible to win the parliamentary elections in spite of losing the presidential election (and conversely, winning the former did not guarantee success in the latter). Nevertheless, defeat in the presidential election significantly increased the chances of failure in the parliamentary election.

Defeat in both elections deserves analysis. How was it that a party that had the instruments for winning everything that was to be won in its hands lost everything there was to lose? PO held so many aces in its hand, above all, continuing economic growth, which translated into higher living standards.

My analysis posits that the margin of defeat in both lost elections was so small that it would have been sufficient to eliminate certain obvious campaign errors (especially those in the presidential elections that, as I have written, had great significance) in order to win. I see the causes of the defeat (defeats) on three levels: tactical (campaign errors), normative (lack of a clear message as to why they wanted to win), and structural (exhaustion of the support of a certain group in the electorate as a result of disappointed hopes). I present them below in this order.

**TACTICAL FACTORS**

Immediately after the presidential elections there were many attempts to explain the defeat. Perhaps the electorate simply did not realize that Poland was developing well (the PiS candidate Andrzej Duda ruth-

<sup>1</sup> This part and the part on tactical, normative and structural factors are slightly modified versions of an article for a collection prepared by the Stefan Batory Foundation. In it, I make use of certain theses contained in an article for *Gazeta Wyborcza* from May 29, 2015 entitled "Why Komorowski Lost." Andrzej Rychard, "Dlatego przegrał Komorowski," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, May 29, 2015. In the part "Beginnings" I refer to my ideas presented in my article in *Teraz Polska*, no.1/2017.

lessly exploited this lack of knowledge), or else Poles do not really want stabilization, growth and democracy? I reject both of these explanations emphatically.

Some of the explanations are wide of the mark. Moreover, their diagnoses are laden with some of the errors that contributed to the defeat of the president. *Gazeta Wyborcza* ex-editor-in-chief, Adam Michnik, and Paweł Wroński formulated one of these diagnoses: "The elections show that, for the majority of voters, a Poland of stabilization is not enough; economic growth, democracy, and civil rights; tolerance; a pluralistic media and freedom from censorship; an independent Poland protected by membership of the EU and NATO; free from religious and ethnic conflicts; respected in the capitals of other countries. This model of Poland has been challenged."<sup>2</sup> In short, paradise is not enough for the majority of Poles, and so it has been challenged. Or, the majority of Poles do not want things to be good. This theory in my opinion represents a sort of "social masochism."

A different conception was formulated by Radosław Markowski: "Duda also used the slogan of Poland's return to the path of rapid growth because he correctly believed that his electorate did not know that they were living in a country with the fastest economic development in Europe, with deflation, falling unemployment, and a decreasing budget deficit. And also in a country with decreasing inequality, excellent international evaluation of our education system, and the significant role of women in public life (see the report in *The Economist*, March 7, 2017)."<sup>3</sup>

In other words the electorate of the victor-to-be did not know that things were going well and he (the PiS candidate, Andrzej Duda) cynically exploited this lack of information. This is, then, a theory of social lack of information: people do not know that they are well off. In other words, for PO candidate Kopacz to win, a pedagogical campaign and distribution of the report in *The Economist* would have sufficed. It was simply necessary to inform the uninformed that they were well off. Why did no one on the campaign staff think of it?

<sup>2</sup> "Prezydent Andrzej Duda," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, May 25, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> "Wady i zalety kampanii," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, May 16, 2015.

The masochism theory and the conception of the uninformed are reminiscent of something. Is it by any chance the vision of a society that does not know what is good for it? It is similar to some of the ideas once represented by the former party Freedom Union (UW). One should recall that they did not turn out to be very effective.<sup>4</sup>

I believe that precisely one of these tactical factors was indicated in the above diagnoses: a certain cocksureness, a belief that representatives of the ruling party “know better,” and that social consciousness simply cannot keep pace with them. It is a short step from that kind of thinking to the opinion that all that they lacked to ensure victory was good propaganda.

Certainly a factor in Komorowski's defeat was the unclear role of the PO in the campaign and mistakes by the staff itself. A mixture of the initial passivity of the candidate and, after, a certain nervousness expressing itself in ill-considered attempts to outdo the radical candidate Paweł Kukiz (e.g., the sudden proposal for a referendum about single candidate constituencies supported by Kukiz), are also factors in the defeat. At the tactical level, in the parliamentary elections, the lack of clear messages, a coherent team, and practical support for the entire effort regarding the image and work of the then PO premier, Ewa Kopacz, should also be noted.

#### **NORMATIVE FACTORS**

These were essential mainly in the case of the parliamentary elections. I regard as fundamental among them the lack of a clearly outlined vision of why power was being sought. The message about the stabilizing value of continuity was not enough, especially after eight years in power. It created the belief that continuity was the fundamental aim. Added to a certain amount of stumbling over exaggerated “scandals” concerning the bugging of some ministers' private conversations, this lack of vision created the impression of hollowness, against

<sup>4</sup> I have in mind here the belief about the value of being the “avant garde” at one time present in the activity of the party with an otherwise immeasurable contribution to Polish democracy, “Unia Wolności” (Freedom Union).

the background of which these “scandals” were pushed to the fore and came to dominate the message.

Lack of vision in the program—and even the explicit deprecation of it that had been visible earlier—was especially important in a situation of increasing uncertainty arising both from changes inside the country and the uncertain external context.

As I have written elsewhere, since 1989, there have been three fundamental pillars of the Polish transformation: the market, democracy, and European integration. These constituted its signposts and anchors. The problem, then, was not the goal, for that was known, but in essence, the speed with which we would achieve it. Nevertheless, this goal ceased to be so clear after a certain time. The three slogans mentioned (market, democracy, and Europe) began to lose their mobilizing force. I will refer to the market, that is socioeconomic questions, later in my discussion of structural factors.

The weakness of democracy is, to some extent, a universal problem, though in Poland, it is reinforced by low participation rates and the appearance of anti-system parties. Paradoxically, to the weakness of democracy arising from its pre-modernization and “underdevelopment” as a result of the legacy of the weakness of democracy before communism and its lack under communism, can be added “post-modernization” processes, such as the weakening of the role of conventional politics well described by theorists such as Ulrich Beck.<sup>5</sup> As a result, Poland has, in a way similar to some other postcommunist countries, convinced itself that instead of building modern politics, it has arrived at “outdated modernity.” Additionally, up to 1989, Poles were active in overthrowing communism thanks to the Solidarity movement. Since then, they have become more active as producers and consumers (laying the foundation of Poland’s economic success) rather than as citizens. This also contributed to the weakness of political participation.

And then there is the third pillar: Europe. For years it has been the anchor of the transformation. The EU’s loss of identity in the face of the crisis in Ukraine and the refugee crisis has been very important, although at that time (2014–15) it was not yet so important; these were

<sup>5</sup> Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society. Towards a New Modernity*, trans. Mark Ritter (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 1992).

just the beginning. But there were already problems earlier with European identity and solidarity: how far from solidarity was, for example, the initial reaction of the French president to the financial crisis of 2008–9, calling for support for French car producers. German Chancellor Angela Merkel also made similar pronouncements. Paradoxically, there were no similar calls from the UK, which is leaving the EU, something that also shows how weak EU identity is.

The Polish system of the “transformation promise” as I once called it, was supported by these three pillars, and its weakening caused a normative vacuum.<sup>6</sup> This led to a growth in the need to outline some kind of vision, resignation from extra-political justifications appealing to effectiveness and well-being, and sometimes even a distancing from politics.

PO presented slogans of like, “we build hospitals, we don’t do politics,” and, for example, also of how important “hot water in the faucet” was. This message was effective, especially at the beginning of PO’s rule. It was a reaction to the excessively ideological PiS government in the years 2005–7, which had been full of moral appeals. But already by 2014, there were not enough instruments to reduce growing uncertainty. A political message was needed, a general return to politics. Although de-politicization of the discourse was not exclusively peculiar to PO, as the ruling party, it played a large role in the election.

At the same time it should not be surprising that the general social mood was good; people were rather optimistic. But as the social psychologist Janusz Czapiński notes, people were getting by outside of politics.<sup>7</sup> Often, they even felt they did so in spite of politics. In this situation, the election was won by a party whose leader had never renounced politics and indeed excessively politicized the social and institutional system, putting politics and volition before the law. In a certain sense, the political passivity of PO in recent years has made the task easier. Rather than showing that a different politics is possible, it chose the path of de-politicization. Turning its back on politics

<sup>6</sup> “Czy nowy kryzys legitymizacji i stary deficyt zaufania? Wstępne refleksje i empiryczne ilustracje,” in *Polska-Europa. Wyniki Europejskiego Sondażu Społecznego 2002–2015*, ed. Paweł B. Sztabiński (Warszawa: IFiS Publishers, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> “Polacy są zszczęśliwi, ale chcą zmiany,” *Polityka*, September 15, 2015.



brought a powerful side effect that was disadvantageous for PO. By doing this, PO depoliticized the success of the transformation. Distanting itself from politics (slogans of the kind “we don’t do politics we build hospitals”) did not succeed in conveying effectively what people had achieved. PiS leader Jarosław Kaczyński stepped into the breach. In this interpretation, PO lost because it did not show why it should win, and how the situation of individuals and families would improve if it won. Their opponents managed to do this.

Finally, there is a factor that perhaps also belongs to the normative sphere. In my view, PO made a mistake when it did not agree to a memorial to the victims of the Smoleńsk disaster close to the presidential palace on Krakowskie Przedmieście in Warsaw.<sup>8</sup> Here I mean commemoration of all of the victims. In my view the reasons this was a mistake were of a fundamental, moral nature. This symbol should have been raised out of natural and basic considerations. That is where people gathered at the seat of the president. The “conservation” arguments used (in the view of the curator of ancient monuments, the area was already “closed”) seem petty in the light of the tragedy and placed the whole issue within the realm of current political tactics. Nevertheless, apart from these fundamental aspects, putting such a symbol in that place, precisely under a PO government, would have lowered the level of conflict and aggression and shown PO as a party capable of putting aside current disagreements. Who knows if it would not have had a positive effect on the outcome of the election, although—I emphasize again—in my view, it is not these electoral considerations that should be vital and decisive here.

### STRUCTURAL FACTORS

For more than a quarter of a century, the Polish transformation has rested on the above-mentioned model of “the transformation promise.” In the socioeconomic dimension it has rested on the motivating forces of meritocracy, of long term rewards for investment in

<sup>8</sup> The 2010 disaster involving the Presidential aircraft in which Polish President Lech Kaczyński, together with his wife and altogether almost 100 representatives of the country’s elite lost their lives.

one's own development, and education, that have borne fruit as better opportunities in the labor market develop. However, as sociological research shows, meritocratic motivation has been weakening for a while, and the perceived advantages of higher education have decreased.<sup>9</sup> Other sociologists have shown how frequently people have withdrawn from the market and how significant class divisions have arisen, along with a sense of heightened conflict in society.<sup>10</sup>

The system of "open chances" has slowly closed and left a portion of the young and educated in big cities outside of its bounds. This "precarariat" is not an ideological invention. In this way, a new group of frustrated people was created, those who, under different conditions, would be able to look favorably on PO's offer, since they belonged structurally to the group forming its potential electorate. However, PO had nothing to offer them. The system closed, and a part of that new frustrated electorate chose the strategy of Albert Hirschman's exit (going abroad, withdrawing) and, partly, a "vocal strategy" (voting against the government).<sup>11</sup> PO was seen as the party in government, and so, in fact, perhaps it was even more "the government" as the establishment that lost, rather than a concrete party with a concrete program (all the more so given that the program message was weak, as mentioned earlier).

As a result, first Duda and afterwards PiS gained part of that newly frustrated electorate. Then—as I have written earlier—a successful fusion of the two frustrated groups took place.<sup>12</sup> The traditional base of PiS, "the old frustrated," that is, the relatively poorly educated from places outside of large urban areas fearing that there had been too

<sup>9</sup> Henryk Domański, "Tendencje wymiarów nierówności. Podziały klasowe, otwartość struktury społecznej, nierówności edukacyjne" (paper given at the conference "Polska 2000 Plus," Warszawa, June 21, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Kazimierz M. Słomczyński, Irina Tomescu-Dubrow, and Joshua Kjerulf Dubrow, "Changes in Social Structure, Class, and Stratification: The Polish Panel Survey (POLPAN)," *ASK: Research & Methods* 24, no. 1 (2015): 19–37; Katarzyna Andrejuk, *Postrzeganie konfliktów społecznych: co się zmieniło i dlaczego?: wybrane wyniki Polskiego Badania Panelowego POLPAN 1988–2013* (Warszawa: Zespół Porównawczych Analiz Nierówności Społecznych, Instytut Filozofii i Socjologii Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 2014), accessed, <http://polpan.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Postrzeganie-konfliktow.pdf>. See also Kazimierz Słomczyński, "Rzeczpospolita klas," *Kontakt*, January 26, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> Albert Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972).

<sup>12</sup> Rychard, "Dlatego przegrał Komorowski."

much transformation, and the “newly frustrated,” i.e., the young and better educated part of the electorate who, in contrast to the previous group, fear that there has been “too little” transformation and that the raised expectations have not been fulfilled. In the view of Jarosław Flis, for example, it was thanks precisely to this extra electoral addition of new groups that PiS won the election, or rather—we can say—that PO lost it.<sup>13</sup>

A factor reinforcing these structural considerations noted in a public opinion study was a shift to the right in the views of the electorate. This was particularly visible among the youngest group (18 to 24) and, in 2015, was something observed in that group for the first time in many years. Around one-third of the young people interviewed declared right-wing views. We do not know whether this shift has deeper causes or whether it is, at least to some degree, not a situational reaction to frustrated life opportunities. In any case it has not been sufficiently taken into consideration.<sup>14</sup>

Overall, a combination of three factors brought about the defeat (defeats): tactical, normative, and structural. Legitimization of the government simply by a promise of peaceful continuity was not sufficient in a situation of growing normative uncertainty and the structural “closing” of the system. What was lacking was a vision founded on a sound diagnosis of the social situation. These errors were not only factors in the defeat—and so the victory of the coalition led by PiS. They also brought about the appearance of new entities on the political scene such as *Nowoczesna* and *Ruch Kukiz’15*. As a result, the Polish political realm has been radically remodeled, and we are only now learning its new dynamics.

<sup>13</sup> Batory Foundation, “Co się stało? Co się stanie,” June 15, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej, *Zainteresowanie polityką i poglądy polityczne w latach 1989–2015: deklaracje ludzi młodych na tle ogółu badanych*. Komunikat z Badań CBOS – Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej, ed. Wojciech Kazanecki, no. 135 (Warszawa: Fundacja Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej, 2015), accessed, [www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2015/K\\_135\\_15.PDF](http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2015/K_135_15.PDF).

## BEGINNINGS OF A NEW ORDER?

I mentioned in the introduction, the changes since autumn 2015 go beyond the usual things associated with a change of government. Underlying them, there seems to be a more strategic aim of remodeling the institutional system in Poland. That is to say, the program was never fully articulated, and its basic directions can be inferred from the observation of concrete actions and decisions rather than from reading documents about its program. From this point of view, the PiS government differs from the governments that party formed between 2005 and 2007. Then there was a lot of ideology, of changes at the level of rhetoric (e.g., the slogan of building the Fourth Republic, which was coined then) and almost a total lack of concrete institutional changes. Now it is the other way around: there are concrete institutional changes and noticeably less ideology and rhetoric. Thus, to a certain extent, there was ideology without institutions then, and now there are institutions without ideology.

The belief that a strategic aim underlies the present changes is strengthened by the effective construction of the image of PiS, and particularly of its leader, Jarosław Kaczyński. Among the Polish elite he has the image of a great strategist surrounded by a certain aura of mystery. Because of this, whatever happens in PiS or in connection with PiS is usually followed by the interpretation that it has happened because that is what the party president (of PiS) intended. Without downplaying the very great political talents of Kaczyński, in my opinion, this sometimes leads to an exaggeration of the role of strategy as a factor explaining particular party actions directed by him.

I am not asserting here that the search for a strategy must be fruitless and that perhaps none at all exists. I merely want to note that perhaps not every action of the present government serves a strategy, nor that every instrument has some ulterior motive. Sometimes the instrument itself may be the aim. In any case, it may be clearer than the aim. Sometimes it can even be that there is inconsistency in the activity of the present government, and even a contradiction between the means applied and the instruments and aims they are meant to serve.

Let us start from the means. These are the institutional changes mentioned earlier. They mainly consist of strong centralization and

state control of public institutions; limiting the autonomy of the judiciary (the Constitutional Court conflict); and an increase in institutional influence over public media. These issues—I only mention examples—are generally known. Let us add to them the idea of replacing separate payments to pension funds, health care, and a tax on individual income with a single tax containing all three. No doubt the justification will be that this makes life easier for people. But it is also a very symbolic change, and I will return to it later. Let us add, finally, those moves which have the character of conservative institutional changes, like the discussion over making the law against abortion more restrictive.

As for the aims and the strategy? These are less distinctly articulated, which does not mean that they are absent. Above all, there is the new promise resulting from the correct diagnosis mentioned earlier, namely that the system of the “transformation promise” is closing. This is the promise to open the system for the masses as well as for elites. The promised introduction of a system of social benefits (e.g., the monthly allowance of five hundred zlotys for each child after the first) has a mass character. The opening up of the elite would mean an emphatic change of the elite at many levels and in many areas of social life. The justification for such an opening is a harsh and sometimes brutal repudiation of the past period of government by the PO and its coalition, and sometimes a downright repudiation of important elements characterizing the whole of the last twenty-seven years. This is a rather risky way to go, by the way.

Delegitimization of the last nearly three decades not only points to the senselessness or pathology of the system. Three decades is the lifetime of a whole generation, during which time they studied, made professional careers, and achieved their present positions. Repudiation of those three decades is also a repudiation of their individual lives, and nobody likes that. Keeping things in proportion, it is perhaps the same mistake that the first non-communist government made at the beginning of the postcommunist transformation, repudiating the past *tout court*. Repudiation of the systemic past also repudiates the individual past, and postcommunist nostalgia arose as a counter-effect. Fighting the memory of the past can be counterproductive.

An important element of the strategic goals and perhaps the most frequently articulated is the development of an innovative economy. To this end, the instruments were strengthened in the autumn of 2016, when the vice-premier, Mateusz Morawiecki, who was responsible for the ministry of development, also became minister of finance and head of the Economic Committee of the Council of Ministers, which had just been established. So centralizing measures were applied to achieve economic aims.

Strengthening economic development based on investment and industries that innovate rather than copy, and the general strengthening of Polish entrepreneurs are the declared aims in this sphere. At the same time, Morawiecki also wanted to build a middle class “from the bottom up” among those groups that are in the lower parts of the pyramid.<sup>15</sup> This conception, by the way, does not take into account the fact that, since the mid-1990s, Polish entrepreneurship has had a popular character to a great extent; sociological research shows that almost 40 percent of entrepreneurs were of working class origin.<sup>16</sup>

In the area outside the economy, these ideas were accompanied by a strong historical policy, which played on patriotism (sometimes with a tolerant attitude towards nationalist movements). Here the new government occupied the “empty ground” left by the PO government for whom neither history nor questions of patriotism were sufficiently important.

The question arises as to the coherence of these sketchily outlined aims with the instruments presented earlier, that is, institutional instruments. In my opinion, there is a lot of tension and areas of inconsistency here. How can striving for openness, innovativeness, and modern development be reconciled with institutional mechanisms that promote conservatism, centralization, and control?

In fact, the path to the implementation of a policy of an open, innovative economy under conditions of a system that is centralizing and promoting a certain conservatism may turn out to be the strengthening of the role of the state in the economy with the state serving as

<sup>15</sup> Mateusz Morawiecki, “Nie widzę żadnych zachamowań u inwestorów” (interview), *Rzeczpospolita*, September 29, 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Henryk Domański, “Mobilność i hierarchie stratyfikacyjne,” in *Elementy nowego ładu*, ed. H. Domański and A. Rychard (Warsaw : Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, 1997).

one of the main entrepreneurs. Is that realistic? We will find out in the next few years. It would mean embarking on the road of a kind of “conservative modernization,” which, as we know, would not be a new model in history.<sup>17</sup> How effective it would be in the second decade of the twenty-first century is another question. In particular, the question arises as to how far a centralizing, conservative model of institutional solutions and the exercise of power is compatible with the network logic of contemporary institutional systems in the world, which are based on a certain pluralism and individualization. With reference to internal conditions in Poland, the inconsistency and cracks visible e.g., in the project of tax integration (health, pensions, and income) can also be noted.

I draw attention to this here since, in my view, the introduction of personal income tax and the introduction of the requirement for individual tax declarations was one of the more underrated successes of the transformation. It succeeded and, apart from anything else, taught people responsibility. In general, it rationalized the institutional and social system and, above all, was one of the few mechanisms that built a tie between the citizen (tax payer) and the state. That will perhaps now be squandered. In addition to the problem that throwing all tax revenue into one bag makes the system less transparent and hinders citizens’ ability to monitor state spending, there would no longer be a feeling of individual connection between citizen and state (which was negligible in Poland anyway).

Apart from the tensions already mentioned, there are also certain inconsistencies in the aims themselves. The most important, it seems, lay in the necessity of increasing social benefits (with the aim of opening the system of opportunities to “the masses”), while simultaneously increasing economic development, investment and innovation. Can they be reconciled? In the area of social life, the conservative aims (as represented by the proposal to pass a more restrictive anti-abortion law, for example) do not take into account the dominant moods in society, which are, in that respect, far from conservative (the

<sup>17</sup> Paradoxically a few years ago, the model of modernization implemented by PO was criticized as “conservative.” See Paweł Kozłowski, A. Karpiński, et al. *Dwudziestolecie polskich przemian: konserwatywna modernizacja* (Warsaw: Instytut Nauk Ekonomicznych PAN, 2011).

October 2016 mass protests against this restrictive proposal showed that convincingly).

From my perspective, the tensions arising from these inconsistencies may be one of the causes of the ineffective implementation of the PiS program. Usually attention is drawn to a certain questioning of the institutions of liberal democracy as these governments' main threat. That is true, although it is worth taking notice of the deeper cracks in the very activity of PiS. They can obstruct the party. In fact, they can lead to a new closing of the system, and so lead them along the same path as PO, characterized by the same mistakes that brought PiS to power.

Listening to critics of the PiS government, it is sometimes possible to get the impression that analysis of the PiS government is, in fact, a simple task, that this is more of a moral problem than an intellectual one. It is, after all, clear where the party is going. This impression may arise when we look at the main institutional means applied by it: centralization, integration, control. However, that is a superficial conclusion. Underlying these simple means is a more complicated structure. The means applied provoke internal tensions, which conflict with certain aims and can lead to blockage of the system as a result. In that case, not only pressure from the forces of the opposition, but also internal dynamics and tension in the activity of PiS can lead to changes. In fact, I am only drawing out mechanisms common to all institutional systems. It is always worthwhile, therefore, to look at the internal dynamics of the configuration of a government to see the extent to which they are productive and to what extent counterproductive for the aims declared by that government.

## CONCLUSIONS

Analysis of the reasons for the political changes that began in Poland in 2015 and the possible further directions of change, allows the following preliminary conclusions to be drawn.

First, leaders of the winning party shrewdly identified a certain closing of the "system of the transformation promise" mentioned earlier. They came to power with the promise of a "new opening" based



on the introduction of new social benefits (primarily the family benefit). In the minds of many people, this move restored the connection between politics and the situation of the ordinary citizen, which had broken earlier, and, as I have mentioned, the breaking of this connection was one of the reasons for the defeat of the party that remained in power up to autumn 2015. The new opening, however, also leads to attempts to build new elites and a fundamental change to the system of institutions, a change weakening its liberal character.

And here we come to the second conclusion: the changes introduced are characterized by certain inconsistencies. There is an inconsistency between the new social promises and the costs they bring about, and the scope of development of the economy. There is also an inconsistency between the declared aims of development based on an open economy and on innovation and the measures applied: centralization and limitation of the autonomy of independent institutions as well as a certain distancing from deepening European integration.

Third, the changes introduced since 2015 have tested the existing belief that, since 1989, we have succeeded in building strong institutions of democracy, while civil society has remained relatively weak. It turns out that the reverse holds: many institutions of liberal democracy (the Constitutional Tribunal foremost) were remodeled almost overnight, while “weak” civil society showed itself capable of mobilization and mass protest. As a result of these processes we can expect that the further dynamics of the situation in Poland will be the outcome of the interplay between internal tensions and inconsistencies in the ruling camp and external, social pressures.

Finally, it is worthwhile to analyze current events from a historical perspective, recalling that the path of dependency limits the discretionary leeway of all governments, even those with the most radical ideas. I mention this because sometimes the opinion can be heard (expressed in the media by the political scientist Radosław Markowski) that perhaps, in fact, Poland has been through an exceptional period since 1989. So by turning away from liberal democracy, it is returning to a “normal” state. The pessimism contained in this thesis, namely that those years were simply an exception, is, in my judgment, exaggerated. It does not take path dependency into account. In the course of this period of almost a generation, the social structure has changed

significantly; it has modernized and ties to Europe become stronger and been naturalized. Such deep structural changes have occurred that every politician and every party has had to take them into account. Societies, Polish society among them, are not made of clay and cannot be easily modeled. They have their own history, memory, and dynamics, and all of us, politicians included, should remember this.

## AUTHORITARIAN DRIVE IN POLAND

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DAVID OST

When the Law and Justice (PiS) party, led by the immovable Jarosław Kaczyński, moved to crack down on the Constitutional Court within weeks of coming to power in November 2015, many thought it was a politically unwise move. Why provoke opposition at the very moment of coming to power, when even those who had just voted against them might want to be persuaded that those in power were also thinking of them?

PiS after all did have gifts it was anxious to share, such as a generous new child-support grant, with the five hundred zloty (\$130) monthly payment for every second child and all subsequent children (and for the poorest families for the first child as well), and a crackdown on exploitative so-called “junk” contracts.

But while they, no doubt, could have hidden their intentions a little better and refrained from belligerent talk, PiS clearly felt a need to make sure there was no institution in the country with any legal power to challenge what the new legislative and executive powers were intending to do. The jury is still out over whether it was the wisest policy with which to begin the administration, since it engendered the birth of a new civic opposition movement—the Committee to Defend Democracy (KOD). But there is no question that the attack was successful, in that there really was no institution in the country with any legal power to challenge what the government was doing.

Unlike Fidesz in neighboring Hungary, PiS does not have a two-thirds majority with which to change the constitution. Like Fidesz, however, it has the same desire to change the constitution, in order to justify its no-holds-barred authoritarian takeover of all levers of power. Having eviscerated the Constitutional Court by changing the

laws governing its operation and by refusing not only to abide by court decisions it does not like, but even recognize such decisions as legal, PiS has already established the principle that it can do anything it wishes to do. Anything.

What about opposition? Technically of course, it exists, but PiS's control of parliament makes it difficult for the opposition to do much there. Using a technique first deployed in Hungary, PiS puts forth most of its bills as "individual MP" submissions, not governmental ones. The difference is that the former does not require public consultation and these bills can sail through parliament from start to finish in a single day. Bills as crucial and controversial as re-politicizing the civil service or establishing direct government control over public media were both passed at this impossible Stakhanovist pace. In these sessions, opposition MPs are able to ask a few questions but not to have their questions answered. Instead, the Speaker of the House just says, "thank you for your questions," and immediately calls a vote. Neither PiS nor opposition deputies have even been able to read the full bills in question, but the centralized party structure means that every PiS deputy votes according to the leader's instructions.

In December 2016, after an opposition deputy was removed from the podium for allegedly speaking on an inappropriate issue (the Speaker of the House alone determines what is "appropriate"), other opposition deputies occupied the podium, demanding the Speaker reinstate the deputy's right to speak and abandon plans to limit press access to parliament—the issue that the ejected deputy had been trying to highlight. This escalation of a conflict seemed to have put PiS on the defensive. But refusing to fight fire with anything but more fire, Kaczyński responded by moving his supporters to a separate chamber, where PiS passed bills without even allowing opposition deputies inside. Soon afterwards, the regime's main TV channel quickly cobbled together a thirty minute broadcast shown in prime time, not to explain the government's rationale, but to accuse the opposition of preparing a coup d'état: "They said it was about defending the press's right to access, but in reality they were attempting a 'putsch.'"

The opposition now finds itself in a trap. Either it sits by idly, unable to get its voice heard, allowing the government to say "the opposition does nothing!" Or, it acts with militancy, in which case the

government accuses it of seeking the violent overthrow of the government. In this and other areas, similarities with communist-era policies are unmistakable.

### MALIGNING DISSENT

PiS has been preparing the ground for its authoritarian illiberalism ever since the 2010 Smoleńsk catastrophe, in which then-president Lech Kaczyński was killed along with much of the political class. PiS had lost parliamentary elections three years earlier and was certain to lose the upcoming presidential elections too. The plane crash, however, gave it a martyr and led to its absurd conspiracy story of a Russian plot (as if Poland in 2010 was a lethal threat to Russia's survival) helped by Polish liberals themselves. PiS started preparing for its own authoritarian rule by wildly accusing the then-governing Civic Platform (PO) party of the same thing. Within months of the crash, PiS intellectual Zdzisław Krasnodębski claimed, without evidence, that PO was preparing to introduce dictatorship and that PiS would be de-legalized.<sup>1</sup> Today, when it has all the power, it still accuses its rivals of plotting dictatorship; better, in this way, to present its own drive to authoritarianism as defensive.

Civil servants committed to the rule of law and to inclusive legal structures might be able to reduce much of this politically inflicted damage. But already in December 2015, PiS passed a new civil service law that withdrew the requirement for prior experience and the proscription on political party membership for the heads of state bureaucracies. For good measure, the independent Civil Service Advisory Council, which was set up to advise the premier on personnel policy, was eliminated too. PiS loyalists then staffed the state at all levels—except for local government, most of which is still in the hands of the opposition, having been elected prior to PiS's 2015 parliamentary sweep. As 2018 got underway, PiS was still considering introducing

<sup>1</sup> Zdzisławem Krasnodębskim, "Prof. Krasnodębski: 'Nie mogę wykluczyć, że [za rok] PiS będzie zdelegalizowany, dojdzie do morderstw,'" *wPolityce.pl*, October 27, 2010, <http://wpolityce.pl/polityka/106839-prof-krasnodebski-nie-moge-wykluczyc-ze-za-rok-pis-bedzie-zdelegalizowany-dojdzie-do-morderstw>.

electoral “reforms” prior to the Fall 2018 local elections, in an effort to reduce opposition strength.

Can’t the press resist? So far it can, but can it do so for long? *Gazeta Wyborcza*, still the leading opinion-forming daily in Poland, has come under steady attack from the government, though so far the pressure is mostly financial. All government offices and state-dominated firms are forbidden to advertise in the paper; private firms hoping for government contracts have been warned that their practices in this regard will be watched. Income from ads declined by 25 percent in the first year of PiS power, causing *Gazeta* to announce layoffs and cut back on its regional inserts.<sup>2</sup>

Fidesz’s strategy in Hungary was to get a sympathetic owner to buy a commanding share of the opposition paper and then close it for financial reasons. *Népszabadság* was shut down just like that in October 2016, with even its entire rich internet archive disappearing as well. Fearing the same in Poland, *Gazeta Wyborcza* got George Soros to buy 11 percent of its publisher’s shares in June 2016. Not coincidentally, PiS soon after began ratcheting up its campaign against “foreign intervention” in the Polish media market. Opposition TV stations still operate, but are facing similar pressure. Ideally PiS would like to keep all but isolated internet sites from having any impact on public debate.

Meanwhile, the state takeover of “public” broadcasting (now called “national” broadcasting, as in media aimed at promoting the “nation”) has entailed a wholesale purge of personnel. As for the news, there has been a pure “Breitbart-isation.” I recall watching a talk show on the main state television station immediately after the PiS takeover where the new talking heads said that “finally” they could tell “the truth” about the “so-called refugees”: namely that they were not really refugees and that as Muslims they were “terrorists.” Today, anyone who does not equate Muslim with terrorist is accused of craven “political correctness.” Of course, the real “political correctness” now binding in Poland and Hungary, and else-

<sup>2</sup> Adam Michnik, “Adam Michnik: zmiana władzy straszliwie walnęła ‘Gazetę Wyborczą’ po kieszeni, nie stać nas na oddziały regionalne i korespondentów,” *wirtualnemedi.pl*, November 23, 2016, <http://www.wirtualnemedi.pl/artykul/adam-michnik-zmiana-wladzy-straszliwie-walnela-gazete-wyborcza-po-kieszeni-nie-stac-nas-na-oddzialy-regionalne-i-korespondentow>.

where where the radical right comes to power, is that these regimes still insist they are for “democracy” when their daily practices demonstrate that they seek unchecked power for themselves and that they accept “democracy” only when their own party wins elections.

Not surprisingly, the toxic official rhetoric encourages street violence against “others.” There has been a sharp escalation in attacks on foreign-looking individuals since PiS came to power. Even in Warsaw a professor was sucker-punched for speaking German to a German colleague in a tram. PiS policy is to say absolutely nothing on public assaults. It does not endorse them, but it never condemns them. It never even notes them. Without publicity by the opposition press or on social media, such assaults would go completely uncommented on, much less prosecuted.

Why the silence? PiS’s aim is to prevent what happened in Hungary, where Jobbik, highlighting anti-Semitic and anti-Roma racism, grew strong as the contender to the right of Fidesz. PiS policy is that “to the right of us must be only the wall.” Since condemning assaults would allow nationalists to protest the “maligning” of “patriotic Poles simply defending their Fatherland,” PiS condemns nothing.

Schools are also being targeted. The massive curricular change recently introduced will not only shut down thousands of middle schools (*gimnazje*), and thus allow massive layoffs of teachers, bypassing union agreements, but also require a dramatic increase in “patriotic education” at the expense of the liberal arts. Purges at universities are being introduced more slowly. Journals and grant applications focused on topics PiS does not like are simply no longer funded by the state. In January 2017, the Life and Family Foundation, affiliated with PiS, began asking universities for names and details of faculty members teaching gender studies and other “anti-family” subjects. The reduction in state support to universities teaching “anti-patriotic” topics is likely.

NGOs, of course, also carry out educational projects, and work with many of the same marginalized people to whom PiS has been appealing. In Fall 2016, PiS began attacking NGOs as sinecures for political rivals, sites of unadorned corruption, and safe spaces for foreign agents. A Russian-style law requiring all NGOs that accept funds from abroad (increasingly necessary now that the state withdraws its

support) to register as “foreign agents” may well be introduced before the next elections. (Such a law was passed in Hungary in June 2017.) Catholic organizations explicitly linked to the (wealthy) Church, meanwhile, are awarded huge sums from the state budget. Salazar-style Catholic corporatism is increasingly a relevant comparison.

### WHAT DOES PiS WANT?

Now that they have all these policies in place, what is the broader aim? Clearly, the main aim is to govern, and thereby reshape society along the lines they prefer. PiS is willing to take a hit to the economy and to suffer isolation within the European Union if it can instill alternative rules and ideas as the guiding ones of the country. Cultural counterrevolution, conservative nationalism, and a pervasive “unity” based on the vision of the governing party all seem central to PiS’s vision. Reversing what they see as a nefarious global trend towards openness and expanded freedom is certainly a central goal.

The Polish Pope John Paul II consistently spoke of undermining the culture of consumerism and individualism allegedly rampant in Europe and being promoted, as neoliberalism, to the world. The Polish right takes this seriously. Its more messianic representatives—and there are plenty of these—hark back to old Polish conceits of being the West’s fount of morality, its conscience, for which it has always paid a price. In this view, it is the very suffering of Poland, its victimization at the hands of stronger neighbors, which makes it uniquely qualified to redeem the West. Criticisms by the European Union of violations of rule of law are thus treated by PiS in two ways: as a nuisance that unfairly sullies Poland’s brand but also as a badge of pride, as confirmation that the country follows its own path and no longer takes orders from snooty self-styled superiors.

It follows, then, that one of the conditions facilitating the rise of the right is a crisis in the idea of progress. Progress has never been a natural concept in Eastern Europe. Long languishing behind the West in terms of economic development and state strength, and with a peasantry living largely as abject subalterns until the middle of the twentieth century, the region fiercely embraced progress only under



communist party control.<sup>3</sup> That the idea was compromised due to that system's stagnant and dependent political structure was clear from the regularly recurring political opposition. Yet, the hopes and expectations placed in the 1989 transformations—that finally the enemy of our enemy will realize our long-postponed dreams of prosperity—indicate that people still hoped for an earthly salvation, to be realized by a market economy naively embraced as “normality.”

For many people things did get better, and they make up the sizeable liberal bloc, which is still strong, particularly in the cities. For this group, things got better not only materially but also existentially. Through a new-found European mobility promoted generously by the European Union, they also discovered a new community of like-minded Europeans striving to build a new kind of transnational order.

Others, however, lost their jobs and their communities, losses for which even the gradual attainment of previously unthinkable consumer goods like cell phones and flatscreen TVs failed to compensate. Many of them travel to Western Europe, too, but they experience life there as marginalized workers, increasingly shunned even by putative “classmates” whose fear of eastern competition underlay 2016's Brexit.

For this group, PiS slogans clearly appeal: “We'll take care of our own. We'll build up the state. We stand up to enemies.” Moreover, unlike its previous tenure from 2005 to 2007, PiS has moved away from orthodox neoliberalism. This time it has promised an extensive social policy and delivered, too. Its flagship social program is the five hundred zlotys (€125) per month allocation to parents of every child after the first (and for the poor, the first too), which has led to a dramatic decline in child poverty rates. It has introduced free medication for people over seventy-five, restricted the endless use of short job contracts, and pushed forward a minimum wage that is higher than even trade unions were demanding.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> This argument was superbly developed by Andrzej Leder, *Prześlona rewolucja: ćwiczenie z logiki historycznej* (Warsaw : Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Sławomir Sierakowski, “The Five Lessons of Populist Rule,” *project-syndicate.org*, January 2, 2017. <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/lesson-of-populist-rule-in-poland-by-slawomir-sierakowski-2017-01>.

## CONCLUSIONS

Can it succeed? Probably yes. The social policies are, in part, paid for by a tax on banks and insurance companies.<sup>5</sup> Poland may still face budget difficulties, and a major depression would certainly change matters. But a major depression is not likely to hit Poland, mainly because its workforce really is cheaper than that of its western neighbors, and European capital cannot resist. Only if Germany and France are taken over by a radical right committed to keeping capital at home will Polish industry really be in danger. That is unlikely, particularly in Germany. But if it did come to pass, the ensuing collapsing economy would at least be offset by a political regime committed to “sovereignty” over everything else, and thus better able to enforce sacrifice than its liberal rivals.

Although PiS’s system promotes enmity, theoretically it is open to everyone. “Get rid of your liberal ideas, shun connections with former elites, and you too can be part of our project.” In a country without significant ethnic or racial divisions, PiS’s claim to represent the interests of the “nation” against dangerous outsiders appeals to “the people” in a way quite similar to the way the communists did in 1945. They are certainly more inclusive than Trump can be in the United States, as the latter’s appeal to the “real America” is always an appeal to whiteness. The Polish and Hungarian right appeal to whiteness, too—their fierce anti-Islamism without Muslims is a not-so-subtle proclamation that they are and will stay “whiter” than their degenerate western allies. But with whites basically all there are, this can unite people more easily than in the immigrant societies of the West.

Of course, PiS’s lavishing itself with patriotic gel and noisily proclaiming that it realizes the will of “the nation” does not mean the opposition is any different. PiS does seek to inculcate a perception of the opposition as a bunch of traitors. Kaczyński never misses an occasion to denounce his rivals as such, and, as noted, the 2017 TV propaganda show “Putsch” insists on just such an interpretation.

<sup>5</sup> Bartosz Matusik and Aleksandra Kozłowska, “Poland: New Tax on Banks and Other Financial Institutions,” *dlapiper.com*, March 22, 2016, <https://www.dlapiper.com/en/us/insights/publications/2016/03/global-tax-news-mar-2016/poland-new-tax-on-banks>.

It is true that liberals are wary of the isolationist, racist, and authoritarian tendencies of “nation-minders” in the Polish past, particularly prominent in the “National Democratic” tradition of Roman Dmowski.<sup>6</sup> For that reason they have sometimes spoken derisively about the Polish nation. Indeed, in 1987, former Prime Minister Donald Tusk, then thirty years old and the leader of a small liberal party, penned a short piece—seized on by the right ever since—with the memorable line, “Polishness is non-normalness.” Of course, that was 1987, the late communist times, and Tusk was simply longing for a world in which people talk of “culture, civilization, and money” instead of Poland’s constant “God, Honor, and Fatherland” where they “build, love, and die, while Poles must fight, rise up, and perish.”<sup>7</sup> Tusk was not, of course, “against Poland,” but rather against the tedious cult and cultivation of a Polishness stuck in a beleaguered past and fighting constantly against “enemies”; a Poland that identifies the new and modern with the dangerous; that rejects criticism of its past as an assault on its vital myths; and insists that myths remain not just inviolate but central.

Liberals are not anti-national, but they have a very different conception of the nation—as something to be developed and improved, not just cherished. To the extent that they say this aloud, they get run over by the “patriots.” To the extent that they hide it, they are unable to challenge the patriots. It is because of the trap of nation-talk that liberals promoted the idea of “civil society” instead. Civil society became the way Poland could make progress and still remain Poland. At least that was the vision of the 1970s’ new left, and of much of Solidarity too. PiS, like Fidesz, now wages war on the idea of “civil society” and speaks only of “the nation.” Many years in power enabled liberals to change the subject and become associated with modernity instead. But with “modernity” having resulted in economic crisis, PiS has had considerable success with its discursive contention. To this day, nation-talk remains a minefield liberals still do not quite know how to navigate.

<sup>6</sup> See Brian Porter, *When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth Century Poland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Donald Tusk, “Polak rozłamany,” *Znak*, nos. 11–12 (1987), available at [http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/1,124059,16065504,Polak\\_rozlamany.html](http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/1,124059,16065504,Polak_rozlamany.html).

Interestingly, the new left party (though not “new left” party) Razem, or “Together,” may yet have more success doing so than the liberals. Led entirely by activists in their twenties and thirties, they have a more pragmatic view of “the nation” and are quite comfortable using that term and—like European socialists in pre-globalization times—injecting it with class characteristics. In other words, they speak of Poland in class terms, and seek to represent a Poland that is suffering both from neoliberalism and from nationalist authoritarianism. Their 3.6 percent of the vote in 2015 was a major breakthrough, given the party’s formation less than a year earlier, though it still indicates they have a long way before breaking into the mainstream. But their strong opposition to economic liberalism along with their forceful defense of political liberalism, combined with their determination to participate in local politics and not just campaign as talking heads in the media, may well give them a strong basis to contend for power if and when the PiS bubble bursts.

## THE TRIUMPH OF NATIONAL COMMUNISM

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BRIAN PORTER-SZŰCS

Outside observers could easily become confused by the rhetoric of the current political struggle in Poland. On the one hand, PiS presents itself as the most uncompromising opponent of communism and its legacy, but on the other hand, many liberal and leftist critics have described the past year as a resurrection of the PRL (Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa, or Polish People's Republic—the moniker of the communist state from 1945–89).<sup>1</sup> Although these two claims seem mutually exclusive, both are partly correct. The centrality of Catholicism to the PiS worldview is obviously irreconcilable with the consistent anticlericalism of the old PZPR (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, or Polish United Workers Party—the name of the communist party from 1948–90). Jarosław Kaczyński's glorification of the armed resistance to the Soviet Union in the late 1940s or the Solidarity movement of 1980–81 would not suggest hidden communist sympathies, and it is hard to imagine that any PiS voter would be inspired by the slogan “workers of the world, unite!” But just below the surface of this undeniable anticommunism, PiS has indeed perpetuated a strand of Polish politics with roots in the PRL. Recognizing this his-

<sup>1</sup> This is common theme in anti-PiS polemics. For just a few examples, see Dariusz Ćwiklak, “Tydzień z wehikułem czasu,” *Newsweek Polska*, no. 2 (2016), accessed July 15, 2016, <http://www.newsweek.pl/plus/peryskop/pis-jak-pzpr-nowe-wladze-przywoluja-ducha-prl,artykuly,376530,1,z.html>; Jarek Nieten, “Czy wraz z PiS wraca komunizm?” *Wiadomości24.pl* (November 11, 2015), accessed July 15, 2016, [http://www.wiadomosci24.pl/artykul/czy\\_wraz\\_z\\_pis\\_wraca\\_komunizm\\_339919.html](http://www.wiadomosci24.pl/artykul/czy_wraz_z_pis_wraca_komunizm_339919.html); “Rostowski: Rządy PiS gorsze niż komunizm,” *Super Express*, May 25, 2016, accessed July 15, 2016, [http://www.se.pl/wiadomosci/polityka/rostowski-rzady-pis-gorsze-niz-komunizm\\_843091.html](http://www.se.pl/wiadomosci/polityka/rostowski-rzady-pis-gorsze-niz-komunizm_843091.html). Links verified.

torical context not only helps us understand the PiS phenomenon, but retrospectively casts a new light on the whole postwar era.

For the past decade or so, scholars have finally begun clearing away the fog that came from viewing Polish history through a Cold War lens. In doing so, they have questioned the conventional periodization of post-World War Two Polish history. Once upon a time, the story started with a dark era of Stalinist “totalitarianism,” followed by a liberalizing (but incomplete) “thaw” in 1956. But that turned out to be merely a transfer from the freezer to the refrigerator, as became starkly evident with the invasion of Czechoslovakia and the “anti-Zionist” campaign in 1968 and the massacre of striking workers in Gdańsk in 1970. The Solidarity movement then appeared as a cry of frustration against Poland’s ongoing lack of “freedom” and/or “independence.” The chronology of anticommunism, meanwhile, has typically been cast as the gradual establishment of an alliance between Catholic conservatives on the one hand, and social democrats on the other. The latter group consisted largely of people who had once supported the PZPR, but became disillusioned after the events of 1968–70. By the time Solidarity came along, the story goes, the old suspicions between right-wing anticommunism and left-wing anti-communism were set aside, as everyone came to understand that the real divide was between those who believed in democracy and those who did not.<sup>2</sup>

This is not the place to mount a thorough critic of that conventional understanding of modern Polish history, but a few key elements of the story are relevant to our understanding of PiS. Specifically, it is becoming increasingly clear that 1) the PZPR was not liberalized after 1956, it was nationalized, and 2) the Catholic an-

<sup>2</sup> Some version of this storyline can be found in almost every survey of modern Polish history since at least the 1980s. For a few examples, see Marian K. Dziewanowski, *Poland in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980); Andrzej Friszke, *Polska: Losy państwa i narodu 1939–1989* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Iskry, 2007); Jakub Karpinski, *Countdown: The Polish Upheavals of 1956, 1968, 1970, 1976, 1980*, trans. Olga Amsterdamska and Gene M. Moore (New York: Karz-Cohl, 1982); Andrzej Paczkowski, *Pół wieku dziejów Polski, 1939–1989* (Warszawa: PWN, 2000); Joseph Rothschild and Nancy M. Wingfield, *Return to Diversity: A Political History of East Central Europe since WWII*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

tipathy to communism was intense and sincere, but targeted in a different direction than many secular activists realized at the time.

It is comforting to think that communism gradually but inexorably unraveled, from the “totalitarianism” of immediate postwar years, through (incompletely) reformed communism, and finally towards total collapse and the triumph of liberalism, constitutionalism, the rule of law, and individual liberty. A wave of scholarship over the past decade or so, however, has challenged this teleological story, reframing East European history within a broader global context.<sup>3</sup> As Andrzej Leder persuasively argued, for all the (many!) sins of the Stalinists, the period from 1945–56 was truly revolutionary, in the sense that the pre-World War Two vectors of power in Poland (and the corresponding mentalities) were turned upside down and scrambled.<sup>4</sup> This was a dark time for intellectuals, activists from non-communist parties, landowners, businessmen, and virtually anyone with any direct connection to the interwar Polish state. Workers and peasants hardly prospered in the ways that PZPR propaganda depicted, and life remained extraordinarily hard as Poland rebuilt. But millions of people saw opportunities for advancement that would have been unimaginable before, as those once on the margins of Polish society stepped up to occupy the positions left vacant by the victims of Stalinism and

<sup>3</sup> Some of these challenges and re-contextualizations have dealt specifically with Poland; others have raised similar questions regarding other sites in East-Central Europe. The common methodological approach in all these cases has been to approach the study of communism from the perspective of a specific topic or group of people not previously considered to be an important part of the story. The most important examples include Kate Brown, *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Brown, *Plutopia: Nuclear Families, Atomic Cities, and the Great Soviet and American Plutonium Disasters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Zsuzsa Gille, *From the Cult of Waste to the Trash Heap of History: The Politics of Waste in Socialist and Postsocialist Hungary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); Kristen Ghodsee, *The Red Riviera: Gender, Tourism, and Postsocialism on the Black Sea* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); Lynne Haney, *Inventing the Needy: Gender and the Politics of Welfare in Hungary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Longina Jakubowska, *Patrons of History: Nobility, Capital, and Political Transitions in Poland* (London: Ashgate, 2012); Małgorzata Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Martha Lampland, *The Object of Labor: Commodification in Socialist Hungary* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995); Mary Neuburger, *Balkan Smoke: Tobacco and the Making of Modern Bulgaria* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Andrzej Leder, *Prześlona rewolucja: Ćwiczenie z logiki historycznej* (Warszawa: Krytyka Polityczna, 2014).

(to an even larger degree) Nazism. Even gender hierarchies were undermined, though never to the degree that apologists for communism claimed. Obviously this came at a staggering cost, but we cannot understand postwar Polish history if we look at the Stalinist era solely through the prism of oppression, terror, and violence.

From this new perspective, 1956 appears as the Thermidor to Poland's Revolution, and like the French original, it both ended the worst violence and rolled back some of the radical social transformations of previous years. The rise of Władysław Gomułka can then be seen not as a liberalizing thaw, but as a withdrawal by the PZPR from any serious ambition to fundamentally transform Polish culture and society.<sup>5</sup> Even in the late 1940s, as the communists were seizing power in Poland, Gomułka represented a very distinct kind of communism. His slogan then (and later) was the "*Polska Droga*" (the Polish Road, or Polish Way), which is often understood to imply that the communists of each particular country should adopt the path to socialism most suited to their context. Actually, his arguments went deeper than mere tactics; he also questioned the assumption that the end point of socialist development would look the same in each country. His road was not called Polish because it ran through Poland, but because it led to Poland.<sup>6</sup>

After 1956, the red-and-white Polish flag became much more prominent than the red communist flag, and state propaganda intensified the use of the adjective "Polish" before all the old communist slogan words (the Polish proletariat, the Polish people, and above all Polish communism). Back in the 1940s, Gomułka had been attacked by his Party comrades for "nationalist deviation," for advocating a "national communism" in place of the more doctrinally correct internationalism. The intentional parallel between national communism and national socialism (Nazism) was hyperbole, but with all due acknowledgment

<sup>5</sup> I made this argument in *Poland in the Modern World: Beyond Martyrdom* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 231–57.

<sup>6</sup> On Gomułka's nationalism, see Marcin Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm: Nacjonalistyczna legitymizacja władzy komunistycznej w Polsce* (Warszawa: Trio, 2001). For a comparative perspective, see Krzysztof Tyszka, *Nacjonalizm w komunizmie: Ideologia narodowa w Związku Radzieckim i Polsce Ludowej* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, 2004).



of Godwin's Law, the label is accurate.<sup>7</sup> In Gomułka's Poland, the official ideology of the state glorified ethno-national homogeneity, resurrected old stories about (repeated) national martyrdom in the struggle for independence, and kindled hatred towards foreigners (particularly Germans and Jews). Yes, the PZPR remained deferential to the USSR, but the rationale for doing so changed. Whereas earlier communists had praised Stalin for leading the global proletariat and for defeating the international menace of Fascism, Gomułka's PZPR defended the alliance with the Soviets as the best means of sustaining Poland's sovereignty and its postwar territorial acquisitions against German revanchism.<sup>8</sup> The Polish People's Republic may have been a workers' state, but it was undeniably a nation-state.

It is, therefore, no surprise that some nationalists—former members of the National Democratic movement (the *Endecja*)—participated in the work of the Polish People's Republic in a variety of functions. But most of those on the far right either left the country or withdrew from political activism, and the primary reason is crucial: the PZPR's legitimacy was never recognized by the Catholic Church. Gomułka and his successors downplayed many of socialism's goals, but they could never entirely abandon the foundational anticlericalism and scientism of the Marxist project. For their part, the Church hierarchy had been demonizing (literally!) socialism for so long that a reversal seemed inconceivable. Given the importance of Catholicism to twentieth century Polish nationalism, Gomułka's national communism was doomed.<sup>9</sup>

As inevitable as that failure may have been, it does raise a question that rarely gets posed: if the post-World War Two Church leadership

<sup>7</sup> Godwin's law state's that any online discussion, if it continues long enough, will always devolve into an accusation that someone is a Nazi. See Mike Godwin, "Meme, Counter-Meme," *Wired* (October 1994), accessed July 18, 2016, <http://www.wired.com/1994/10/godwin-if-2>.

<sup>8</sup> It is easy to overstate the contrast here, insofar as the Stalinists also deployed nationalist rhetoric at times. See, for example, T. David Curp, *A Clean Sweep? The Politics of Ethnic Cleansing in Western Poland, 1945-1960* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2006); Michael Fleming, *Communism, Nationalism, and Ethnicity in Poland, 1944-1950* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> As I have argued elsewhere, nationalism was not always so central to Polish Catholicism, but it had become so by the interwar years (if not even a bit earlier). See Porter-Szűcs, *Faith and Fatherland: Modernity, Catholicism, and Poland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

did not accept communism, just what sort of social, economic, and political system did they want to see in Poland?<sup>10</sup> One thing was very clear: they did not want Poland to become a liberal capitalist democracy. In the United States, the Catholic Church became a prominent force in Cold War anticommunism, but it had not been that long since most Protestant Americans and most of the Catholic Curia in Rome considered the Church to be antithetical to the ideals of the US Constitution.<sup>11</sup> Leo XIII is famous for his critique of capitalism in *Rerum Novarum*, but less well-known is *Testem benevolentiae nostrae*, which condemned what he called “Americanism.” In this document he repudiated the claim that religious pluralism could ever be a good thing, that people in the modern world should prioritize their own conscience and judgment over their obedience to authority (particularly spiritual authority), and above all that the Church and the State should be separated. Lincoln’s famous claim that government should be “of the people, by the people, and for the people” was, even for the comparatively reform-minded Leo, unthinkable: the only aim of government and the only source of legitimacy was God. This attitude persisted well into the twentieth century. Although Pius XII seemed to ally the Church with the United States after World War Two (particularly with his 1949 excommunication of all those who cooperated with communists), in fact he saw this as an uncomfortable alignment against a common foe.<sup>12</sup> Ironically, he felt about the US much as he did about Nazi Germany: they both contradicted fundamental Church teachings, but he was willing to set those differences aside because of what he considered a danger of apocalyptic proportions: communism.

The problem with communism, for most of the Catholic hierarchy, was not that it challenged capitalism and democracy. Quite the contrary: they saw it as the culmination of all the evils unleashed by capi-

<sup>10</sup> I examine this question in greater length in *Faith and Fatherland: Modernity, Catholicism, and Poland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 158–207.

<sup>11</sup> On the tense position of Catholicism in the United States, see Frank J. Coppa, *The Policies and Politics of Pope Pius XII between Diplomacy and Morality* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011); John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom* (New York: Norton, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> On Catholicism, the US, and the Cold War, see Patrick H. McNamara, *A Catholic Cold War: Edmund A. Walsh and the Politics of American Anticommunism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).

talism and democracy. It stood at the very bottom of the slippery slope down which humanity had been descending since the Enlightenment. Only at the Second Vatican Council (1963–65) did the Church soften its stance on modernity and democracy—but even then, Catholic hostility towards individualism and capitalism remained. While many Polish Catholics expressed great enthusiasm for the transformations of Vatican II, many (perhaps most) of the clergy were cautious, if not downright opposed. Crucially, both Primate Stefan Wyszyński and his successor Józef Glemp continued to see a direct line from liberal individualism, through political democracy, to communism. In fact, some have argued that the Polish clergy was more open to dialogue with the national communists of the PZPR than with the left-liberals and social democrats of the secular anticommunist opposition.<sup>13</sup> Karol Wojtyła represented a more open stance towards modernity, but after 1979, his direct influence over the Polish Church was attenuated even as his symbolic influence expanded to unimaginable heights. I do not want to downplay the importance of left-wing Catholic magazines like *Tygodnik Powszechny*, which enthusiastically embraced Vatican II. Still, it is now clear that such efforts had minimal (if any) long-term impact on the overwhelming majority of the clergy.

In the 1970s and 1980s, most observers thought that the Catholics and the secular left had reached a rapprochement, maybe even a genuine alliance in the struggle against communism.<sup>14</sup> In hindsight, however, we can see how fragile and superficial that brief confluence of interests was. When the PZPR was finally overthrown in 1989, the disillusionment among conservative Catholics was immediate and bit-

<sup>13</sup> Andrzej Romanowski, “Kościół, lewica, wojna,” *Znak* 681 (2012), accessed July 18, 2016, <http://www miesiecznik.znak.com.pl/6812011andrzej-romanowskikosciol-lewica-wojna>. Piotr Kosicki has argued that there were, in fact, some serious efforts across Europe to start a dialogue between communists and Catholics. Kosicki, *Catholics on the Barricades: Poland, France, and “Revolution,” 1939–1956* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

<sup>14</sup> The key texts that marked the attempt to establish this alliance were (from the right) Bogdan Cywiński, *Rodowody niepokornych* (Kraków: Znak, 1971); and (from the left) Adam Michnik, *Kościół, lewica, dialog* (Rome: Instytut Literacki, 1977). On the role of the Church in the anticommunism of that time, see Jan Kubik, *The Power of Symbols Against the Symbols of Power: The Rise of Solidarity and the Fall of State Socialism in Poland* (State College, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).

ter.<sup>15</sup> Instead of the systemic counterrevolution that most priests and bishops had desired, they saw Poland change from one unacceptable regime (communism) to another (liberal capitalist democracy). People outside Poland express bewilderment when those on the far right insist that nothing significant changed in 1989, that it was all a big conspiracy to allow PZPR functionaries to retain positions of power, that Lech Wałęsa was a communist agent, etc.<sup>16</sup> From the perspective of those who saw the protagonists in the Cold War as authoritarian communism and liberal democratic capitalism, it is absurd to suggest that 1989 was anything less than an epic triumph. But from the perspective of those who saw communism as the logical consequence of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, then all the Poles did was crawl a little bit backwards on that road to perdition.

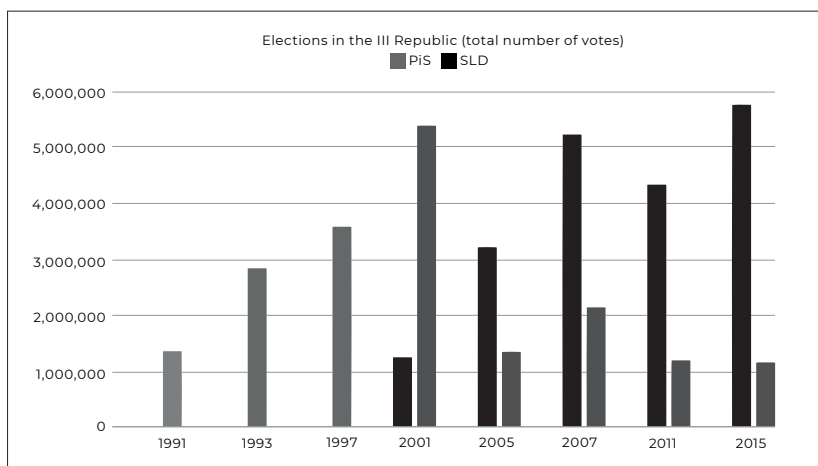
1989 was therefore experienced as a failure for two large ideological clusters: the national communists of the PZPR and the Catholic conservatives. The former lost all credibility, and their rhetorical vocabulary was discredited. Even the word *robotnik* (worker) nearly vanished from the public stage, to be replaced by *pracownik* (employee). But large swaths of the PZPR's worldview remained popular: hostility towards foreigners (Germans and Jews, as before, but now Russians too and eventually Arabs), a commitment to egalitarian economic policies, and a longing for social discipline and unity. All of those issues were central to the disillusioned Catholics as well, who were able to slide right into the spot that had been occupied by the national communists. The only significant difference was that they could add to the PZPR's mix the one key element that the communists never had: the imprimatur of the Church.

In this light, it is no coincidence that the Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej (Union of the Democratic Left—the successor party to the PZPR) collapsed precisely when PiS emerged as a political force. There is no cause-and-effect relationship here, because SLD's implosion was brought about largely by the party's own problems with cor-

<sup>15</sup> I elaborate on this point in *Faith and Fatherland*, 267–71.

<sup>16</sup> Perhaps the most infamous recent articulation of this conspiratorial interpretation of Poland's past is Dorota Kania, Jerzy Targalski, and Maciej Marosz, *Resortowe dzieci* (Warszawa: Fronda, 2013). For an example of the presentation of the leader of the Solidarity movement as a communist agent, see Sławomir Cenckiewicz, *Wałęsa: Człowiek z teczki* (Poznań: Zysk, 2013).

ruption and ideological incoherence. But once they were gone, they left behind an open space that PiS could fill.

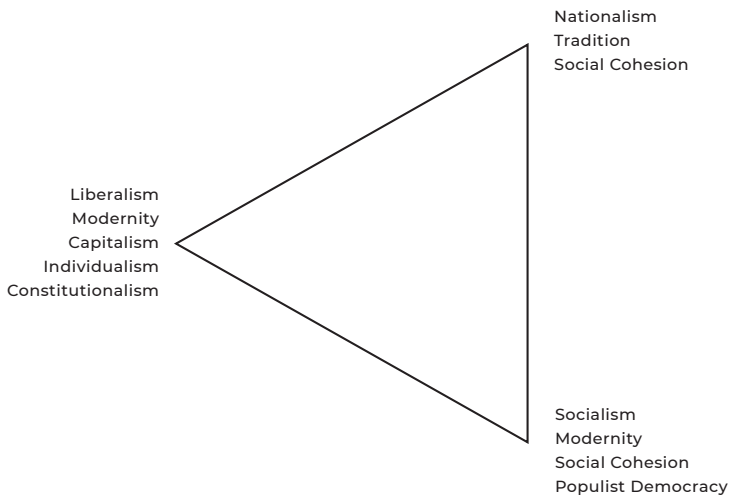


Initially, SLD tried to break with its legacy and refashion itself as a moderate social democratic party. But even when it was successful in the late 1990s, it was widely seen as an ideologically malleable technocratic party, or simply an agglomeration of clientelist relationships. To be sure, the party's base included the All-Poland Alliance of Labor Unions (Ogólnopolskie Porozumienie Związków Zawodowych, or OPZZ), which rivaled the Solidarity labor union in membership. But organized labor in general was rapidly disappearing in the early 2000s, with membership falling to 11 percent of the working population by 2014.<sup>17</sup> In any case, SLD's ties to a labor union did not translate into a policy agenda that mobilized working-class support. At least some of the party's leaders retained the old worldview of national communism. In June 2016, former SLD chairman Leszek Miller gave an interview in which he echoed many of Kaczyński's arguments about the unacceptability of "foreign interference," about the need for unified national authority, about the irrelevance of constitutional technicalities that might interfere with valuable policy goals. Insofar as he criticized PiS, it was for allowing diplomatic niceties to get in the way of prop-

<sup>17</sup> Karolina Goś-Wójcicka and Tomasz Sekuła, *Związki zawodowe w Polsce w 2014 r.* (Warsaw: Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 2015), 5.

erly condemning the “genocidal” policies of the Ukrainian nationalist movement towards Poland during World War Two.<sup>18</sup>

It is tempting to describe this as a manifestation of the old bromide about the far left and the far right circling back to each other. A better geometric metaphor, though, would begin with a triangle, with liberal democracy on one vertex, nationalist conservatism on another, and socialism on the third. This alternative shape is helpful because it allows us to envision the shifts that different political movements must make in order to establish alliances or to create new blended ideologies.

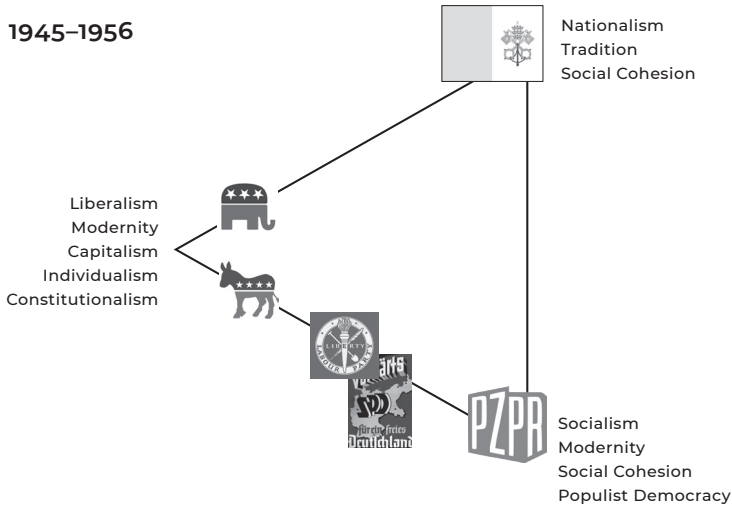


In this scheme, the immediate postwar years saw most political parties in the US and Western Europe positioned somewhere on the lower-left edge of the triangle, with the upper-right vertex largely discredited by the horrors of fascism. At that point, the Vatican was one of the few institutions still occupying that spot. Communism, meanwhile, was firmly lodged on the bottom-right vertex.

<sup>18</sup> See Dorota Kowalska, “Leszek Miller: Unia Europejska ma w sprawie TK słabe karty i PiS to wie,” *Polska The Times* (June 13, 2016), accessed July 18, 2016, <http://www.polska-times.pl/opinie/a/leszek-miller-unia-europejska-ma-w-sprawie-tk-slabe-karty-i-pis-to-wie-wywiad,10103432>.

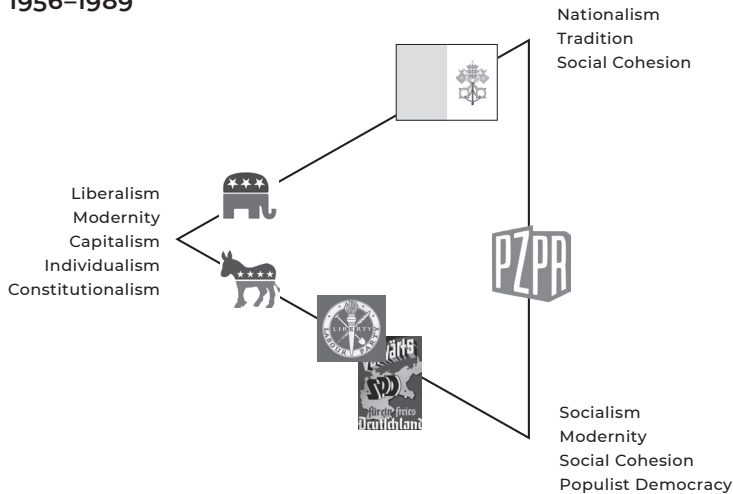
## THE TRIUMPH OF NATIONAL COMMUNISM

1945–1956



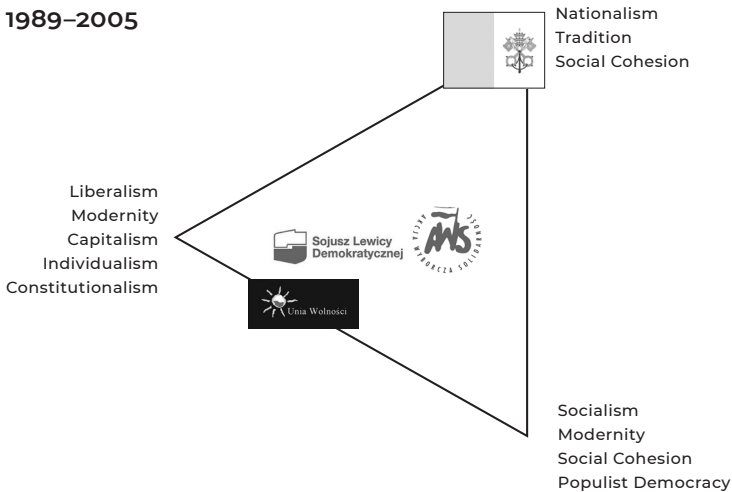
The rise of Gomułka's national communism after 1956, as I argued earlier, did not push the PZPR towards liberalism, but upwards along the right-hand edge of the triangle. Meanwhile, the Second Vatican Council dislodged the Church from the very furthest vertex, though that change was harder to see in Poland.

1956–1989



After 1989, the PZPR was gone, leaving a gaping hole in Poland's political landscape. The large majority of the intelligentsia had hoped to create something like an American or West European array of center-left and center-right parties, but as David Ost has argued, these efforts left very little space for the politics of anger and frustration.<sup>19</sup> With SLD trying to avoid any association with communism, no one on the national political stage spoke for the workers, who watched in fury as unemployment soared (to over 16 percent in the late 1990s) and the unionization rate fell to nearly 12 percent, among the lowest in Europe and only barely above the US figure.<sup>20</sup> The most emotional political debates throughout the 1990s circled around cultural issues, with liberals pushing for a more secular state and conservatives hoping to retain a significant place for Catholicism. There was an obvious problem with the resulting picture.

1989–2005



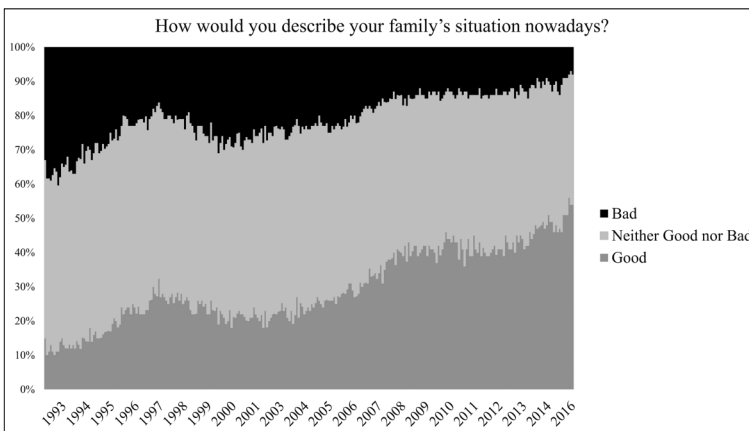
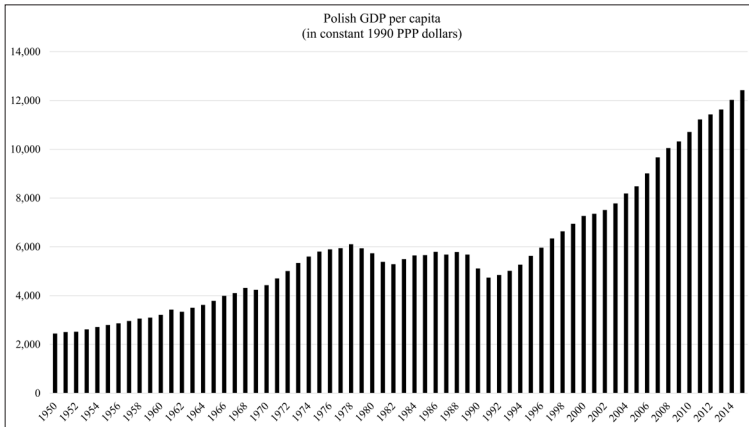
The way in which that gaping hole was filled was by no means preordained. Those who saw Polish politics through the distorted prism of Warsaw can be forgiven (I hope, because I was among them) for believing that increasing prosperity and secularization would cause the

<sup>19</sup> David Ost, *The Defeat of Solidarity: Anger and Politics in Postcommunist Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

<sup>20</sup> Statistics from OECD ([https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=UN\\_DEN](https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=UN_DEN)), accessed July 18, 2016.



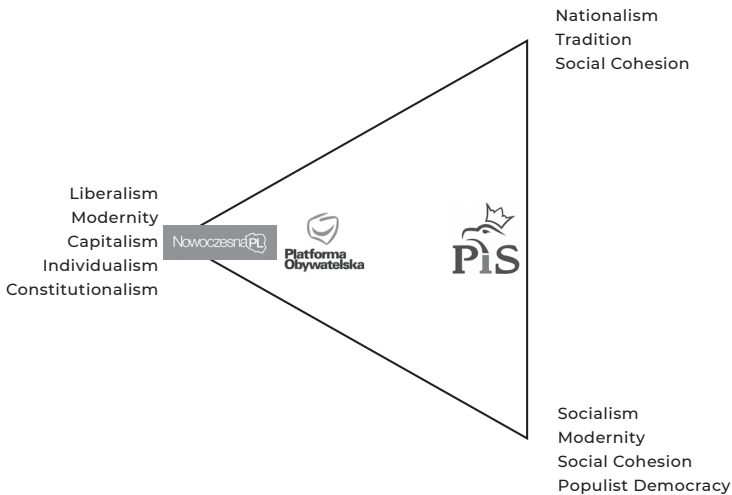
upper-right segment of the triangle to gradually die out. We focused on the unprecedented growth in the Polish economy, and the fact that more and more Poles were reporting that they were happy with their lives and optimistic about the future.<sup>21</sup>



<sup>21</sup> GDP figures from the Conference Board, accessed July 18, 2016, <https://www.conference-board.org/data/economydatabase/index.cfm?id=27762>. Attitudes about family well-being from CBOS, accessed February 8, 2016, [http://cbos.pl/PL/trendy/os\\_poziom\\_zycia\\_tabela.php](http://cbos.pl/PL/trendy/os_poziom_zycia_tabela.php).

What we did not realize was that while traditional Catholic conservatism was in fact in decline, the foundation for Gomułka's national communism had never gone away. That worldview did not represent a majority of the population, but with the right concatenation of political forces, even a party with support of around a third of the electorate can come to power (as we saw after the 2015 election). Thus, we ended up with today's political landscape.<sup>22</sup>

### 2005–THE PRESENT



I have deliberately removed the Church from this final diagram, because I do not perceive a significant Catholic force in Polish politics today that is independent from PiS. The episcopate and most of the clergy have hitched their star to Kaczyński, and henceforth their fates are inextricably linked, for better or worse.

Although I have located PiS in precisely the spot that the PZPR had occupied, I am not arguing that Kaczyński is a communist. Instead, I am suggesting that the PZPR itself had moved away from earlier

<sup>22</sup> I have dated this from 2005 (when PiS first took power) rather than 2001 (when PiS was founded). All the talk of a PiS-PO alliance back in 2004–5 indicates that a great many people still believed that PiS was a reiteration of AWS—that is, a conservative Catholic party that would still fit within the broad framework of a liberal parliamentary democracy. After 2005, it became clear that this was not the case.

forms of Leninism and even Stalinism, towards national communism. That was the ideology overthrown in 1989. For anyone who embraced the broad framework of liberal democracy (everyone from social democrats through libertarians to Christian democrats), this was an unambiguous victory. But many in Poland did not want that sort of revolution back in the 1980s. Instead, they longed for a state that would repudiate the whole left vertex of my ideological triangle. They wanted a state that would preserve the PZPR's commitment to social cohesion, cultural homogeneity, and nationalism, but imbue it with a Catholic rather than a leftist conceptual vocabulary. PiS is not simply a resurrection of the PZPR, nor is it just a return to the pre-World War Two radical right—too much water has passed under the bridge since the 1930s for overt fascism to be viable in Europe today. Instead, we best understand PiS as a blend between the post-1956 PZPR (shorn of any ties to the Marxist tradition) with the pre-1939 *Endecja*. Kaczyński, then, appears as the illegitimate child of Roman Dmowski and Władysław Gomułka.

## POLISH RIGHT-WING POPULISM<sup>1</sup>

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ARTUR LIPIŃSKI AND AGNIESZKA STĘPIŃSKA

The elections of 2014 and 2015 increased academic interest in the sources of populist success in Poland and the role of new media in the diffusion of populist messages and subsequent mobilization of potential supporters for several reasons. Above all, the focus was on two right-wing populist political actors, Janusz Korwin-Mikke and Paweł Kukiz, both of whom achieved stunning electoral successes.

At the time, Korwin-Mikke had already been present in various political guises on the Polish political scene for twenty-five years. During that period, he launched several political parties, with the last one taking part in the 2015 elections—Koalicja Odnowy Rzeczypospolitej Wolność i Nadzieja-KORWiN (Coalition of the Republic's Renewal Freedom and Hope; hereafter, KORWiN). During these twenty-five years on the political stage, Korwin-Mikke promoted a neoconservative vision with emphasis on a free market, minimal state interference, and a radical critique of the bureaucratic apparatus, particularly the tax apparatus, combined with anti-EU arguments.<sup>2</sup>

Although he had been rather a marginal political actor for a very long time, never crossing the threshold of 2.5 percent of votes, in the 2014 European parliamentary elections his party came in fourth with 7.15 percent and 11 seats. A year later, he received 4.76 percent of votes in national parliamentary elections.

<sup>1</sup> The work is sponsored by the National Science Center, Poland, grant ID: 2015/18/M/HS5/00080.

<sup>2</sup> Agnieszka Stępińska, *Marketingowe strategie wyborcze. Wybory prezydenckie w Polsce 1990–2000* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe INPiD UAM, 2004); Artur Lipiński, *Prawica Na Polskiej Scenie Politycznej. Historia, Organizacja, Tożsamość*, Warszawa (Warszawa: Elipsa, 2016).

Kukiz, meanwhile, came onto the political scene in 2015 with his political movement Kukiz'15, finishing third in the presidential elections (with 20.8 percent of the vote) and winning 8.81 percent in the parliamentary elections of 2015. Before formally entering politics, Kukiz was better known as a rock star and political activist. The main focus of his activism was the replacement of Poland's list-based electoral system with a UK-style single-member constituency system. He argued that this was a key instrument in destroying what he called "the partiocratic system." Although in 2005 and 2007 parliamentary elections Kukiz supported *Platforma Obywatelska* (Civic Platform; hereafter, PO), in subsequent years he veered towards much more conservative and nationalist milieux.

It is not only the domestic political scene, but also the profiles of those who support populist actors, that have changed significantly. Namely, both the aforementioned political actors managed to garner huge support from young voters. Both politicians performed very well despite the fact that they could not draw on the resources and organizational infrastructure enjoyed by their political opponents. Although they disparaged the mainstream media as a part of the "Establishment," they actually received some coverage and provided very good examples of the power of skillful communication online and via social media: Facebook and Twitter.

Another important feature in common is their radical right-wing, populist character. The majority of analyses of populism refer to Cas Mudde's definition, namely that it is "an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite,' and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people."<sup>3</sup> Other scholars emphasize a strongly normative or even moralistic character of the Us-Them division, the exclusion of specific groups from the homogenous community, and a sense of crisis.<sup>4</sup> Both Kukiz's and Korwin-Mikke's discourse fit this definition well. Both positioned themselves as anti-system politicians aiming to restore normality in a situation portrayed as a crisis or catas-

<sup>3</sup> Cas Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004), 543.

<sup>4</sup> Maathijs Rooduijn, "The Nucleus of Populism: In Search of the Lowest Common Denominator," *Government and Opposition* 49, no. 4 (2014), 578.

trophe. Both grounded their discourse in the strong division between elites and “ordinary people,” burdening the former with the responsibility for building “socialism,” “system,” “oligarchy,” or “partiocracy.” Furthermore, they deliberately exploited the occasion posed by the refugee crisis by employing strong and exclusionary discourse based on hatred and fear.

The main question here is how to explain the electoral results of both political actors: what are the causes of the breakthrough of Korwin-Mikke and the immediate success of Kukiz?

As theoretical background, we employ two concepts: political opportunity structure and discursive opportunities.<sup>5</sup> While the former states that “the capacity to mobilize depends on opportunities and constraints offered by the political-institutional setting,” the latter explicates how structurally given political opportunities become publicly visible by capturing the role of the public sphere in politics and identifying the media as the medium whereby political actors disseminate their ideas.<sup>6</sup> Another aspect is the resonance and legitimacy of the populist message in the specific public sphere. The degree to which the reactions of dominant political actors support the political claims formulated by the populists determines their chance to spread their message and win votes.<sup>7</sup>

We agree that these two sets of necessary conditions or facilitating factors are relevant to understand the electoral success of Korwin-Mikke and Kukiz. Moreover, we argue that it is the interaction between the abovementioned factors and programmatic winning formula that was responsible for the extraordinary results of the elec-

<sup>5</sup> Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930–1970* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1994); Hanspeter Kriesi, et al., *New Social Movements in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); Ruud Koopmans and Jasper Muis, “The Rise of Right-Wing Populist Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands: A Discursive Opportunity Approach,” *European Journal of Political Research*, no. 48 (2009): 642–64; Ruud Koopmans and Susan Olzak, “Discursive Opportunities and the Evolution of Right-Wing Violence in Germany,” *American Journal of Sociology* 110, no. 1 (2004): 198–230.

<sup>6</sup> Koopmans and Muis, “The Rise of Right-Wing Populist Pim Fortuyn,” 647.

<sup>7</sup> Koopmans and Muis, “Discursive Opportunities,” 202.

tions. In order to examine this phenomenon, our study will refer to five elements.

First, we look at demand-side factors that have created a political, social and cultural “reservoir” to be exploited by far-right political parties, such as voter volatility and socioeconomic conditions, as well as a perception of the immigration threat.

Secondly, we study Korwin-Mikke’s and Kukiz’s success in public opinion as indicated by the intention to vote for these political actors and their actual election results, with a main focus on the socio-demographic profiles of the voters.

Third, we analyze the visibility of both political actors in the traditional media and their activity in social media.

Fourth, in order to grasp the resonance and legitimacy of the populist messages, we also take into consideration such supply-side factors as the structure of the electoral system and the responses of Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice, hereafter PiS) as an established political actor and, after 2007, the biggest opposition party with wide access to the media and huge support of the electorate.

Fifth, we scrutinize the populist aspects of the electoral formula disseminated via social media by Korwin-Mikke and Kukiz.

### POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES

Much of the previous research on the rise of right-wing parties has focused on the structural conditions that have facilitated their emergence.<sup>8</sup> One of these factors is the low level of consistent voter behavior resulting in the high level of volatility and low level of party loyalty that has been observed among Polish voters. For example, in 2015, only half of PO’s electorate from 2011 (51.9 percent) voted for that party, while 13.3 percent voted for Nowoczesna, 10.9 percent voted for PO’s main opponent, PiS, and 6.5 percent for Kukiz’15.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Wouter Van der Brug and Meindert Fennema, “What Causes People to Vote for a Radical-Right Party? A Review of Recent Work,” *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 19, no. 4 (2007): 474–87.

<sup>9</sup> Mateusz Wojtalik, “Wyniki wyborów: PiS przejmuje Polskę, a prawica młódzież,” *Newsweek Polska*, October 26, 2016, accessed December 7, 2016, <http://www.newsweek>.

Furthermore, 25.2 percent of those who voted for a newcomer in the 2011 parliamentary elections, the radically anti-clerical and culturally left-wing Palikot Movement, voted for the rightist Kukiz'15 four years later.<sup>10</sup>

The electoral volatility of the electorate, both at the aggregated level measured using the so-called Pedersen Index and the individual level recreated on the basis of Polish voters' preferences published by the PGSW (Polish National Electoral Study), was very high until 2007, from 62.2 in 1993 to 34.5 in 2007. Although it dropped in the 2011 elections to a level of 23.1, it was still very high in comparison to Western countries. Moreover, the relative openness of the political system for newcomer parties has been bolstered by ideological instability among Polish voters and systematically high electoral abstention numbers (from 49 percent to 59 percent from 2001 to 2015).<sup>11</sup>

Another factor belonging to the social structural explanation is an increased sense of threat from immigrants.<sup>12</sup> Despite the relatively low immigration figure suggested by the European Commission, Poles seemed to be afraid of the very idea: 78 percent believed that it would lead to a decrease in security and would be a huge burden on the budget.<sup>13</sup> In 2015, over a half of Polish people (51 percent) were against taking in any refugees. Noteworthy is the fact that the youngest potential voters (those between the ages of 18–24 and 25–34) were the most reluctant (76 percent and 56 percent, respectively), while older people were more prepared to accept refugees. Moreover, a critical

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pl/polska/szczegolowe-wyniki-wyborow-parlamentarnych-2015-jak-glosowaly-wojewodztwa,artykuly,372966,1.html.

<sup>10</sup> Radosław Markowski, "The Polish Parliamentary Election of 2015: A Free And Fair Election That Results in Unfair Political Consequences," *West European Politics* 39, no. 6 (2015): 1311–22.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Peer Scheepers, Merove Gijsberts, and Marcel Coenders, "Ethnic Exclusionism in European Countries: Public Opposition to Civil Rights for Legal Migrants as A Response to Perceived Ethnic Threat," *European Sociological Review* 18, no. 1 (2002): 17–34; Koopmans and Muis, "The Rise of Right-Wing Populist Pim Fortuyn."

<sup>13</sup> Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej, "Polacy o uchodźcach—w internecie i 'realu,'" *cbos.pl*, no. 149 (2015), accessed December 4, 2016, [http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2015/K\\_149\\_15.PDF](http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2015/K_149_15.PDF).



attitude towards the possible admission of refugees was articulated in the online media, where young people are most active.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, studies conducted in 2015 clearly showed that right-wing populist actors such as Kukiz and Korwin-Mikke resonated particularly well with the youngest voters. In 2015, during the presidential elections, as many as 41 percent of Kukiz's voters were the youngest, while the eldest declared barely any support for the candidate. As Table 1 shows, in an exit poll, most older voters declared their support for either Andrzej Duda (PiS) or Bronisław Komorowski (PO).

Table 1. Preferences of age groups of Polish voters in presidential and parliamentary elections: results of exit polls (%)

| Age group | Paweł Kukiz | Kukiz'15 | Janusz Korwin - Mikke | KORWiN | Andrzej Duda | PiS  | Bronisław Komorowski | PO   |
|-----------|-------------|----------|-----------------------|--------|--------------|------|----------------------|------|
| 18–29     | 41.1        | 20.6     | 13.6                  | 16.8   | 20.7         | 26.6 | 13.8                 | 14.4 |
| 30–39     | 29.9        | 12.6     | -                     | 4.8    | 26.3         | 30.6 | 30.8                 | 23.8 |
| 49–49     | 19.2        | 7.7      | -                     | 2.6    | 35.4         | 38.7 | 34.6                 | 25.8 |
| 50–59     | 11.1        | 4.9      | -                     | 1.8    | 44.6         | 47.1 | 35.1                 | 23   |
| 60+       | 3.8         | 2.0      | -                     | 0.6    | 44.9         | 48.7 | 44.3                 | 28.1 |

Source: "To młodzi poparli Kukiza," *Newsweek Polska*, 11 May 2015.

At: <http://polska.newsweek.pl/wyniki-wyborow-prezydenckich-jak-glosowali-mlodzi,artykuly,362980,1.html>, accessed November 8, 2015.; Ipsos for Polsat, TVN i TVP, see: Mateusz Wojtalik, "Wyniki wyborów: PiS przejmie Polskę, a prawica młodziem," *Newsweek Polska*, 26 October 2016. At: <http://www.newsweek.pl/polska/szczegolowe-wyniki-wyborow-parlamentarnych-2015-jak-glosowaly-wojewodztwa,artykuly,372966,1.html>, accessed December 7, 2016.

The findings of studies on the demographic profiles of Kukiz's and Korwin-Mikke's supporters conducted during the election campaign period paint a similar picture (see Table 2). One quarter of all potential voters for these political actors represented the youngest group of voters (18–25 years old). Almost half of Korwin-Mikke's supporters were between 26 and 35 years old. In both cases, there were more men than women and more urban versus rural voters. Both candidates garnered significant support among well-educated people (those with a university degree or at least high school graduates).

<sup>14</sup> Dorota Hall and Agnieszka Mikulska-Jolles, "Uprzedzenia, Strach czy Niewiedza? Młodzi Polacy o Niechęci do Przyjmowania Uchodźców," *Analizy, Raporty, Ekspertyzy*, vol. 1 (Warszawa: Stowarzyszenie Interwencji Prawnej, 2016).

Table 2. Demographic profile of supporters of J.K. Mikke and P. Kukiz (%)

| Age group                          | Janusz Korwin - Mikke | Paweł Kukiz |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------|
| 18–25                              | 24                    | 25.4        |
| 26–35                              | 47.2                  | 29.8        |
| 36–50                              | 22                    | 28.4        |
| 51–65                              | 1.9                   | 16.4        |
| 65+                                | 3,8                   | 0           |
| Gender (% male)                    | 77.4                  | 53.5        |
| Education (% of university degree) | 52.8                  | 46.3        |
| Place of living (% of city)        | 56.6                  | 59.7        |

Source: "Profil wyborcy Janusza Korwin-Mikke w wyborach prezydenckich 2015," Opinium.pl, 25 February 2015. At: <http://www.opinium.pl/profil-wyborcy-janusza-korwin-mikke-w-wyborach-prezydenckich-2015-sondaz-opinium-pl-badanie-internautow-25-02-2015/>, accessed December 2, 2015; "Profil wyborcy Pawła Kukiza w wyborach prezydenckich 2015," Opinium.pl, 25 February 2015. At: <http://www.opinium.pl/profil-wyborcy-pawla-kukiza-w-wyborach-prezydenckich-2015-sondaz-opinium-pl-badanie-internautow-25-02-2015/>, accessed December 2, 2015.

## DISCURSIVE OPPORTUNITIES

The first and most basic aspect of discursive opportunity distinguished by Koopmans and Muis is visibility. This depends on the "number of communicative channels by which a message is included and the prominence of such inclusion."<sup>15</sup> Previous studies tended to focus on traditional media coverage given to political actors, where the amount of attention and character of media coverage (either supportive or critical) were simultaneously perceived as the main opportunities and constraints. Therefore, much attention was paid to the gatekeeping process and the criteria journalists used to decide which topic, event, or political actor to cover (so-called newsworthiness).<sup>16</sup>

To obtain data on discursive opportunity variables, we used a content analysis of television and social media. Television is still the most important source of information about politics in general, and elections in particular, in Poland. Some 79 percent of potential voters in

<sup>15</sup> Koopmans and Muis, "The Rise of Right-Wing Populist Pim Fortuyn," 648.

<sup>16</sup> Pamela J. Shoemaker and Tim P. Vos, *Gatekeeping theory* (New York: Routledge, 2009). On "so called news values," see Tony Harcup and Deirdre O'Neill, "What Is News? Galtung and Ruge revisited," *Journalism Studies* 2, no. 2 (2001).

Poland gain their knowledge about political parties and candidates from broadcasts, while 66 percent get it from political advertising broadcasts on television or radio stations. Almost half of the Polish population (49 percent) receives information on elections from the radio. Only one third of Polish citizens (32 percent) receive information about political events such as election from online media.<sup>17</sup> However, online media seems to be an important source of political information for the youngest voters: 97.5 percent of those between 16 and 24 years old, and 93 percent of those between 25 and 34 years old use the internet on a regular basis.<sup>18</sup>

We collected data on television coverage of political parties and candidates before three elections: the European Parliamentary elections and presidential elections in 2014 and the parliamentary elections in 2015. In each case, we conducted content analyses of main newscasts (the main evening edition), broadcasts by public (TVP1, TVP2, TVP Info) and commercial (TVN, Polsat, TV Trwam, TV Republika, and Superstacja) TV stations. The sample is from newscasts broadcast over the two weeks prior to the day of elections in the case of parliamentary elections (May 10–23, 2014 and October 17–23, 2015), and one week prior to elections in case of the first round of presidential elections (May 2–8, 2015). Additionally, a content analysis of opinion programs (commentary, political talk-shows, or interviews) of several TV stations (TVP1, TVP2, TVP Info, TVN24, Polsat News, and TV Trwam) was conducted during the same periods of time as in case of newscasts. The studies were ordered by Krajowa Rada Radiofonii i Telewizji (National Radio and Television Council; hereafter KRRiT)

Not surprisingly, two mainstream political parties, PiS and PO, as well their presidential candidates (Duda and Komorowski), were the most covered political actors during the election campaigns of 2014 and 2015. Yet, in contradiction to complaints expressed by Kukiz and Korwin-Mikke, their coverage on television was moderate, but rela-

<sup>17</sup> Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej, “Polacy o uchodźcach—w internecie i “realu,” *cbos.pl*, no. 149 (2015), accessed December 4, 2016, [http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2015/K\\_149\\_15.PDF](http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2015/K_149_15.PDF).

<sup>18</sup> Dominik Batorski, “Technologie i media w domach i życiu Polaków. Diagnoza Społeczna 2015, Warunki i Jakość Życia Polaków—Raport,” *Contemporary Economics* 9, no. 4 (2015): 373–95.

tively significant. In 2014, the amount of airtime devoted to Korwin-Mikke and his political party KNP in newscasts and opinion programs was significantly smaller (thirty and 115 minutes, respectively) than PO and PiS (in the case of opinion programs the number was actually five times smaller). However, in the main evening newscasts, more airtime was devoted to KNP than to PSL, the smaller party in the governing coalition with PO at the time. In fact, only two other political parties (except the two leading competitors: PO and PiS) received more airtime in the newscasts than KNP (see Table 3).

Table 3. Airtime dedicated to political parties before European Parliamentary elections (May 10--23, 2014)

| Political party                    | Newscasts (min.) | Publicistic programme (min.) |
|------------------------------------|------------------|------------------------------|
| Platforma Obywatelska (PO)         | 143              | 648,8                        |
| Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS)       | 143              | 545                          |
| Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej (SLD) | 38               | 346                          |
| Europa+Twój Ruch                   | 59               | 327                          |
| Solidarna Polska (SP)              | 27               | 292                          |
| Polska Razem (PR)                  | 19               | 230                          |
| Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe (PSL)   | 21               | 161                          |
| Kongres Nowej Prawicy (KNP)        | 30               | 115                          |
| Ruch Narodowy (RN)                 | 6                | 79                           |

Source: Krajowa Rada Radiofonii i Telewizji (KRRiT), "Kampania PE 2014 - wyniki monitoringu," [krrit.gov.pl](http://www.krrit.gov.pl/krrit/aktualnosci/news,1572,kampania-pe-2014---wyniki-monitoringu.html), 1 August 2014. At <http://www.krrit.gov.pl/krrit/aktualnosci/news,1572,kampania-pe-2014---wyniki-monitoringu.html>, accessed December 4, 2016.

During the final week before the presidential election, Korwin-Mikke and Kukiz received similar attention in terms of the airtime devoted in newscasts per candidate on TV channels (around seventeen minutes). In comparison to Duda (PiS) and Komorowski (PO), the number was about half. Still, in comparison to all others (except M. Ogórek, the candidate of the left-wing political party Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej (Democratic Left Alliance, SLD), the number was actually two times higher (see Table 4). It is worth mentioning that, in the opinion programs, the two main candidates, Komorowski and Duda, were discussed for around two hours, while most of the others candidates received less than one hour of discussion. But again, neither Korwin-Mikke nor Kukiz were treated less favorably than other parties.

Table 4. Airtime dedicated to candidates before presidential elections in 2015  
– 1<sup>st</sup> round (May 2–8, 2015)

| Candidate             | Newcasts | Publicistic programme |
|-----------------------|----------|-----------------------|
| A. Duda               | 00:30:52 | 02:23:05              |
| B. Komorowski         | 00:33:20 | 01:51:55              |
| Adam Jarubas          | 00:06:31 | 00:37:58              |
| Grzegorz Wilk         | 00:04:16 | 00:56:12              |
| Janusz Korwin – Mikke | 00:17:27 | 00:54:38              |
| Janusz Palikot        | 00:08:23 | 00:45:02              |
| Magdalena Ogórek      | 00:11:00 | 01:06:09              |
| Marian Kowalski       | 00:05:16 | 00:49:29              |
| Paweł Kukiz           | 00:17:04 | 00:43:36              |
| Paweł Tanajno         | 00:03:19 | 00:45:34              |
| Grzegorz Braun        | 00:04:16 | 00:43:34              |

Source: "Monitoring kampanii prezydenckiej w telewizji," [kririt.gov.pl](http://kririt.gov.pl), 24 September 2015.  
At: <http://www.kririt.gov.pl/kririt/aktualnosci/news,2069,monitoring-kampanii-prezydenckiej-w-telewizji.html>, accessed December 4, 2016.

Considering the traditional media focused mostly on the two competing political parties (and presidential candidates), the limited funds they had for paid political advertising, and their levels of support among younger voters, both Korwin-Mikke and Kukiz built their communication strategy on social media. Facebook was the main channel of communication used by KNP and its leader Korwin-Mikke before the European parliamentary elections. Interestingly, posts written by Korwin-Mikke received more attention and drove more online activity by Facebook users than posts by Komorowski (the president) and Ewa Kopacz (prime minister).

Table 5. Activity on Facebook before the EP elections in 2014 (May 9–23, 2014)

|                      | Number of POSTS | Mean number of LIKES | Mean number of COMMENTS | Mean number of SHARES |
|----------------------|-----------------|----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Janusz Korwin-Mikke  | 13              | 2053                 | 129                     | 270                   |
| Bronisław Komorowski | 8               | 534                  | 29                      | 41                    |
| Ewa Kopacz           | 21              | 44                   | 2                       | 1                     |

Korwin-Mikke employed the same strategy in 2015 during his presidential and parliamentary election campaigns. During the two-week

period prior to the election, he again received the highest number of responses (either “likes,” comments, or shares) from other Facebook users (see Table 6). In the two weeks prior to election day (the first round), Korwin-Mikke not only was more active than the other main candidates, but his posts received the highest mean number of responses once again. The only exception was the mean number of comments to Komorowski’s posts. However, it was a newcomer in these elections, Kukiz, whose Facebook profile had the highest increase in the number of the observers during that period.

Table 6. Activity on Facebook before the presidential elections in 2015  
(April 24 – May 8, 2015)

|                      | Number of<br>POSTS | Mean number<br>of LIKES | Mean number<br>of COMMENTS | Mean number<br>of SHARES |
|----------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Janusz Korwin-Mikke  | 110                | 3769                    | 164                        | 642                      |
| Paweł Kukiz          | 16                 | 1604                    | 158                        | 189                      |
| Andrzej Duda         | 16                 | 1438                    | 75                         | 158                      |
| Bronisław Komorowski | 56                 | 1998                    | 429                        | 253                      |

Another dimension of the discursive opportunity is the resonance of the agenda of the established political actors and the high level of legitimacy of anti-establishment discourse in the public sphere. In contrast to many Western countries where a *cordon sanitaire* has been developed by the media or (and) political actors as a reaction to the rise of the extreme right-wing populism, this has not happened in Poland. Due to a non-democratic historical legacy, the Polish political party system was divided into two camps, with the postcommunists (left) on one side and former anticommunist opposition on the other (right). Such a situation had several significant consequences.

First, Polish political communication has been extremely polarized since the early 1990s. Second, the extreme-right political parties have been perceived as a solid element of right-wing coalitions against the former communists and later on against competitors from the center-right.<sup>19</sup> Third, the center-right PiS gradually evolved in a much more

<sup>19</sup> Artur Lipiński, *Radykalizacja Czy “Patologiczna Normalność”? Ugrupowania I Ruchy Radykalne W Polsce i W Europie Zachodniej* (Warszawa: Stowarzyszenie Otwarta Rzeczpospolita, 2013), 17.

radical direction, changing its rhetoric, ideology, political allies, and broadening the voter base. Already since 2005, PiS's discourse combined a strong anti-establishment message with the strategic employment of the elements of nationalism and fundamental Catholicism to outmaneuver its coalition partner the League of Polish Families (LPR).<sup>20</sup> Fourth, it entailed a change of attitude towards national-Catholic *Radio Maryja*, which previously had been treated with significant reserve and criticized for pro-Russian sympathies and anti-Semitism. But in 2005, Jarosław Kaczyński claimed that he had been mistaken in warning against *Radio Maryja*. "It is not possible to win elections without *Radio Maryja*," he said.<sup>21</sup> Fifth, the radicalization was part of the carefully designed strategy of securing the right flank of the political spectrum. It was followed consistently after 2007, when PiS failed in the general election and became the biggest opposition party. In one interview, Kaczyński said at the time that there should be no space between PiS and those to the right of PiS.<sup>22</sup> The radicalization was even more pronounced after the Smoleńsk catastrophe on April 10, 2010. The event and the allegedly improper reaction to it by the then-governing PO was used to build strong emotional links to the electorate by attacking political elites, disseminating conspiracy theories, and resorting to populist forms of mobilization, such as mass marches organized by PiS every tenth day of each month to commemorate the victims of the catastrophe.

The refugee crisis that broke out during the election campaign in 2015 provided another window of opportunity for a radicalization of the PiS agenda. Strong criticism of the PO government in accepting seven thousand immigrants over two years as a part of the relocation scheme agreed upon at the September 2015 European Council

<sup>20</sup> Jacek Kucharczyk and Olga Wysocka, "Poland In Populist Politics and Liberal Democracy," in *Central and Eastern Europe*, eds. Grigorij Mesežnikov, Olga Gyárfášová, and Daniel Smilov (Bratislava: Institute for Public Affairs, 2008), 71–100; Rafał Pankowski, *The Populist Radical Right in Poland: The Patriots* (London: Routledge, 2010); Artur Lipiński, *Prawica Na Polskiej Scenie Politycznej w Latach 1989–2011. Historia, organizacja, tożsamość* (Warszawa: Elipsa, 2016).

<sup>21</sup> Jarosław Kaczyński, Lech Kaczyński, Michał Karnowski, and Piotr Zaremba, *O Dwóch Takich. Alfabet Braci Kaczyńskich* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo M, 2006), 292.

<sup>22</sup> Jarosław Kaczyński, "Na prawo Od Nas Tylko Ściana," *Rzeczpospolita*, November 20, 2008, accessed December 10, 2016, <http://www.rp.pl/artykul/222423-Na-prawo-od-nas-tylko-sciana-.html>.

meeting employed all the argumentative tools from the populist repertoire: the victim-perpetrator reversal, the Us-Them dichotomy, the equation of refugees with terrorists, a topos of numbers, catastrophic scenarios, etc.<sup>23</sup> Such a discourse might have helped legitimize a negative approach towards refugees dominant in the Polish public sphere.<sup>24</sup>

PiS's strategy to control the right flank of the Polish scene provided an opportunity for more radical populist groupings, but they could also be a significant constraint at the same time. On the one hand, it normalized populist themes, making them a legitimate part of the public political discourse. On the other hand, its ideological and rhetorical positioning left very little room for right-wing populists. At the level of direct political interactions between PiS and more radical right-wing parties, the former employed a strategy of either discreditation or a self-presentation as the exclusive owner of populist issues. The former strategy was particularly pertinent to PiS in its relationship with Korwin-Mikke's party, portrayed by Kaczyński as "an element of pathology, which serves to reproduce the system in a shape which reduces the opportunities for many Poles."<sup>25</sup> The latter strategy can be discerned in the reaction of PiS towards Kukiz, who was portrayed as a less anti-establishment politician in comparison to Andrzej Duda, PiS's presidential candidate.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Majid Khosravini, "The Representation of Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Immigrants in British Newspapers during the Balkan Conflict (1999) and the British General Election (2005)," *Discourse & Society* 20, no. 4 (2009): 477–98.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, "Kaczyński o uchodźcach: Rząd wprowadza islamskie zagrożenie—wbrew woli narodu," *Frona*, September 16, 2015, accessed December 10, 2016, <http://www.frona.pl/a/kaczynski-o-uchodzcach-islamskie-zagrozenie-rzad-wbrew-woli-narodu,57010.html>.

<sup>25</sup> "Kaczyński o Korwin-Mikke: Jest jak Żyrynowski w Rosji. To element patologii, która służy, by podtrzymywać ten system," *Wpolityce.pl*, April 16, 2015, accessed December 4, 2016, <http://wpolityce.pl/polityka/241140-kaczynski-o-korwin-mikke-jest-jak-zyrinowski-w-rosji-to-element-patologii-ktora-sluzby-by-podtrzymywac-ten-system>.

<sup>26</sup> "Jarosław Kaczyński w Telewizji Trwam: Paweł Kukiz powinien zwrócić się ku naszej formacji," *Wpolityce.pl*, May 6, 2015, accessed December 4, 2016, <http://wpolityce.pl/polityka/243519-jaroslaw-kaczynski-w-telewizji-trwam-pawel-kukiz-powinien-zwrocic-sie-ku-naszej-formacji-szef-pis-mowi-tez-o-warunkach-debaty-duda-komorowski>.



## THE WINNING FORMULA

The political, social, and discursive context facilitated the dissemination of the populist agendas of the two politicians under scrutiny. A qualitative analysis of the content of posts published by the Facebook profiles of Korwin-Mikke and Kukiz during the two weeks preceding the parliamentary elections on October 25, 2015, revealed similarities between two politicians in respect to their attitude towards elites and refugees.

Both Kukiz and Korwin-Mikke based their Facebook posts on the strong dichotomies differentiating people from the elites. Particularly pertinent to both cases is M. Reisigl's remark claiming that one of the rhetorical principles of right-wing populists in Austria is insistent repetition.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, references to elites are abundant in our sample, and, as was clearly visible above, the populist discourse is structured by the negative image of active elites counterposed to the passive people. The elites are represented in a pejorative way in all instances of language use, albeit the grounds for criticism are multifarious. Moreover, the simplified vision of Poland's social stratification (elites vs. society) is enhanced by the emotionally charged, derogatory language. In Kukiz's discourse, the elites are referred to as "gangs," "cliques," "party system cynics," "party oligarchy," "partocracy," or "bands" and "party minions."<sup>28</sup> Whereas Kukiz's critique of the elites was grounded in the patriotic language of conservatism, Korwin-Mikke's discourse promoted a neoconservative vision with its emphasis on the free market, minimal state, and a radical critique of the bureaucratic apparatus, particularly the tax apparatus. Hence, the elites were nominated as a "gang of socialists," "gang of bureaucrats," "gang of four" (the number refers to parliamentary parties), "gang of lefties," "gang of thieves," or, in other words, the apparatus of the

<sup>27</sup> Martin Reisigl, "Analyzing Political Rhetoric," in *Qualitative Discourse Analysis in the Social Sciences*, eds. Ruth Wodak and Michał Krzyżanowski (Basingtoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 140.

<sup>28</sup> Paweł Kukiz's Facebook page, accessed March 28, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/kukizpawel/>.

Third Republic,” “the network between big companies, banks and government,” and “EuroMoscovite elites.”<sup>29</sup>

The dichotomic vision of the world was also reflected in the attitude of both politicians towards refugees. Although it was Korwin-Mikke who paid more attention to the topic, both actors employed similar discursive strategies. Refugees were represented as an omnipresent threat, rather than a demanding policy issue, which requires well-functioning institutions and expertise. The rejection of the admission of refugees by Poland was justified through a securitization of the issue. The refugee crisis was metaphorized as a war or an “invasion” of “hordes” of young men attacking Europe. This argument was strengthened by the topos of threat, which relies on the conditional: “If there are specific dangers or threats, one should do something against them.”<sup>30</sup> Immigrants were conceived not only as a group posing an existential threat to Poland or even the whole of Europe, but also a threat to Polish freedom and culture.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we set out to examine the unexpected career of two right-wing populist political actors: Janusz Korwin-Mikke and Paweł Kukiz and their respective political organizations. It seems that a high level of anti-immigrant threat perception, combined with dissatisfaction with the incumbent government and a negative perception of the socioeconomic situation of the Polish people offered fertile ground for populist parties.

The political opportunity structure perspective adds to our understanding of the potential for radical-right parties. Research shows that political actors may benefit from a system with a high level of volatility, a low level of party loyalty, ideological inconsistency, and large number of non-voters. When combined with the aforementioned sense of insecurity and disappointment with mainstream parties, such

<sup>29</sup> Janusz Korwin-Mikke’s Facebook page, accessed March 28, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/janusz.korwin.mikke/>.

<sup>30</sup> Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean* (London: Sage 2015).

a political system provides space for populist, anti-establishment political initiatives (the case of Kukiz and Kukiz'15).

We also showed that media attention for Kukiz and Korwin-Mikke was moderate: they were covered less intensively than mainstream political parties, PO and PiS, but they were not neglected by the traditional electronic media either. At the same time, they provided very good examples of the significance of skillful communication via online and social media: Facebook (Korwin-Mikke) and Twitter (Kukiz). Hence, they succeeded in reaching the youngest voters who shared a political agenda (or at least dissatisfaction with the establishment in general and the government in particular) with them.

Although the media enable the transmission of a populist message, it cannot provide any communicative impact without the additional property of the discursive opportunity structure. Another important factor for the success of the populist agenda was its ability to resonate with public opinion and the generalized perception of its legitimacy. We suggest that the gradual radicalization of PiS's agenda normalized and legitimized anti-elitist claims in the public eye. As such, together with the high volatility of the electorate, the biggest oppositional party contributed heavily to the anti-establishment climate of the electoral campaign before the 2015 parliamentary elections, providing a fertile ground for the success of an anti-establishment and anti-immigrant agenda of the two populist actors under scrutiny.

## CRISIS? WHAT CRISIS?

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NICHOLAS RICHARDSON

Poland's Constitutional Tribunal is the body, which under the constitution is charged with ruling on whether laws passed by the parliament accord with the constitution. Judges on the tribunal are nominated by the *Sejm*, the lower house of parliament, and appointed by the president. Following the election of a new government in October 2015, the new ruling party, Law and Justice (PiS), the first to win an overall majority without needing a coalition partner, sought to change the composition of the tribunal to bring its political complexion closer to a PiS majority. Thus, what started out as a tit for tat spat between opposing politicians as to the political balance of the Constitutional Tribunal in late 2015, developed into something more serious in 2016, with the government effectively deciding to ignore the rulings of the tribunal.

It is a weakness of the constitution that it provides that the operation of the Constitutional Tribunal is decided by statute, and not by the constitution itself. This allows, as in the present case, a party that does not have the necessary majority to change the constitution to achieve a similar result through procedural means. This essay looks at the changes to the composition of the tribunal and seeks to answer whether there is, indeed, a constitutional crisis, because if the tribunal is unable effectively to perform its vital task of ruling on the constitutionality of laws, there are profound implications for the rule of law and checks on the arbitrary exercise of power in Poland.

The problem started on October 8, 2015, shortly before the general election of October 25, when the *Sejm* nominated five persons to be appointed as judges to the tribunal by the president. While three of these judges would replace three whose terms expired with that of the

outgoing parliament, the terms of two further judges did not expire until the end of the newly elected parliament's term, which commenced on November 12.

On November 19, the new parliament amended the Law on the Constitutional Tribunal, introducing the possibility of annulling the judicial nominations made by the previous parliament and, thus, the ability for the new parliament to nominate five new judges. The amendment also shortened the terms of office of the President and Vice-President of the Tribunal from nine to three years, with the current terms coming to an automatic end within three months of the adoption of this amendment. On November 25, parliament annulled the five nominations from October 8, and on December 2, it nominated five new judges. The Tribunal was asked to rule on the decisions of October 8 and November 25 and delivered two judgments on December 3 and 9.

On December 3, the tribunal ruled that the previous parliament was entitled to nominate three judges to replace those whose terms expired during the term of that parliament but that it was not entitled to make the two nominations to replace the judges whose terms expired during the term of the new parliament. The tribunal also declared that the president was obliged to swear in the three validly elected judges without delay.

On December 9, the tribunal ruled that the new parliament was not entitled to annul the nominations for the three appointments to replace the judges retiring under the previous parliament, but that it was entitled to nominate the two judges whose term of office would begin under the new parliament. The Constitutional Tribunal also ruled that the shortening of the terms of office for the tribunal's current president and vice-president was invalid. Thus, the judgment was that the president was obliged to appoint (i.e., swear in) the three judges nominated by the previous parliament. However, in the meantime, the president gave the oath of office to all five judges nominated by the new parliament, effectively ignoring the judgments of the tribunal and raising the first concerns about the rule of law in Poland. The composition of the Tribunal remained disputed between the institutions of the state.

This was the point at which commentators began to ask whether this was an attempt by the (PiS) government to launch a Viktor Orbán-style constitutional coup.<sup>1</sup> Was this “an anti-democratic march in the direction of a dictatorship” as Andrzej Zoll, the former chief judge of the Constitutional Tribunal warned, or was it a move whose “goal is to make the Constitutional Tribunal more diverse,” as Jarosław Kaczyński, PiS’s founder and leader (and an admirer of Orbán’s approach), said on television?

On December 22, 2015, a law amending the law on the Constitutional Tribunal, the law that governs the functioning of the tribunal, was passed by parliament. This resulted in a letter from the EU Commission to the government sent on December 23, 2015, which asked to be informed about the constitutional situation in Poland. On the same day, the government asked for an opinion on the law of December 22, 2015 from the Venice Commission, the Council of Europe’s human rights watchdog. But without waiting for the Venice Commission’s opinion, the new law was published in the *Official Journal* and entered into force on December 28, 2015.

On March 9, 2016, the Constitutional Tribunal ruled that the law of December 22, 2015 was unconstitutional. That law changed the operation of the tribunal, including (among other changes) requiring judgments to be made by a panel of thirteen of the tribunal’s fifteen judges, instead of the previous law’s nine judge required. It also called for judgments to be adopted by a two-thirds majority on the grounds that the changes would prevent the tribunal from functioning “reliably and efficiently.” For the judgment to be binding, it must be formally published, which the Constitution states should happen immediately, and something which the government refused to do.

Speaking to TVP at the time, Kaczyński said there was no way in which one could talk about it as a ruling and that it was in fact the private standpoint of a certain group of people who happened to fulfill the functions of judges of the Constitutional Tribunal. The difficulty is that, following the earlier shenanigans over the appointment of new judges to the Constitutional Tribunal, there were only twelve

<sup>1</sup> Orbán has been the Hungarian prime minister since 2010, and was also Prime Minister from 1998–2002. Following the sweeping victory of his party Fidesz in the 2010 election, he undertook major constitutional reforms in Hungary.

judges available to hear the case, giving PiS the opportunity to argue that the judgment is not valid.

And so we reach the crux of the issue. Under the constitution, judgments of the Constitutional Tribunal take effect from the date of publication (unless the tribunal decides otherwise), and publication must be immediate. This implies, logically, that until that date, the law of December 22, 2015 changing the operation of the tribunal is legally in effect, allowing the PiS government to contend that the judgment of March 9 is not valid, since it was not made by a panel of thirteen judges. Conversely, the Venice Commission is of the opinion that since the constitution states that the judges of the Constitutional Tribunal are bound by the constitution only, and that legislation on the tribunal has to remain within the bounds of the constitution. Thus, any legislation that threatens to disable constitutional control must itself be evaluated for constitutionality before it can be applied by the court. The very idea of constitutional supremacy implies that any law which allegedly endangers constitutional justice must be controlled—and if need be, annulled—by the Constitutional Tribunal before it enters into force.

On the question of the two-thirds majority, PiS argues that since the constitution provides for judgments of the tribunal to be adopted by a “majority of votes” and not a “simple majority” to be valid, parliament may indeed change the law on the Constitutional Tribunal to impose a qualified majority. The commission was of the opinion that such an interpretation defied both the wording of the provision and Polish constitutional practice up to this point. Changing this provision would require an amendment to the constitution, which would, in turn, require the approval of a two-thirds majority in parliament, something PiS does not have.

On March 11, 2016, the Venice Commission issued an opinion in which it found the amendments of December 22 to be incompatible with the rule of law. It concluded that the judgment by twelve judges had not “fallen short” of Polish constitutional law. “A refusal to publish judgment 47/15 of March 9, 2016 would not only be contrary to the rule of law; such an unprecedented move would further deepen the constitutional crisis triggered by the election of judges in autumn 2015 and the Amendments of 22 December 2015 [. . .] The publica-

tion of the judgment and its respect by the authorities are a precondition for finding a way out of this constitutional crisis.”<sup>2</sup>

The refusal to publish the judgment of March 9 created a level of uncertainty that could have adversely affected not only that judgment, but all future judgments of the tribunal. Since these judgments will, following the judgment of March 9, be rendered in accordance with the rules applicable before December 22, 2015, there was the risk of a continuous argument about every future judgment, and this undermined the proper functioning of constitutional justice in Poland. The tribunal issued a number of judgments after its ruling of March 9, 2016, and none of them were published in the *Official Journal*. Poland’s Supreme Court also adopted a resolution stating that the tribunal’s rulings should be respected even if, as is the case now, the prime minister fails to publish those rulings.

In July 2016, the PiS government introduced another reform law, which removed the two-thirds majority threshold and lowered the quorum for rulings of the tribunal in the most important cases from thirteen to eleven judges. It also required the tribunal president to allow the three unrecognized (by the tribunal) PiS-nominated judges to participate in its work, and introduced a new veto mechanism allowing four justices to postpone a case for up to six months. In August, the tribunal majority also rejected parts of the July law as unconstitutional, including the provisions that four judges could block a case for up to six months, and that the tribunal president should swear in the three contested judges. In response, once again the government claimed that the tribunal had not followed the procedural rules determined by parliament, and it refused to publish the tribunal’s ruling.

At this point, PiS decided to ensure that when the then president of the tribunal’s term expired in December, he would be replaced by one of the judges nominated by the current parliament, with the July law guaranteeing that one of the nominees for the post presented to the president would include at least one of these contested judicial nomi-

<sup>2</sup> European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), Opinion no. 833/2015, “On Amendments to the Act of 25 June 2015 on the Constitutional Tribunal of Poland,” March 11, 2016, [http://citizensobservatory.pl/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Opinion\\_venice-commission.pdf](http://citizensobservatory.pl/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Opinion_venice-commission.pdf)



nees. The PiS-appointed judges prevented the majority from making any nominations to the president by depriving them of the required majority of ten; this thwarted the majority's attempt to require nominees to be supported by a majority before being put to the president.

In December, three new laws were passed to modify the timing and procedure of the elections, including suspending the quorum for the nomination meeting as long as two candidates were proposed and one secured at least five votes. Thus, on the night that Andrzej Rzepliński's term of office ended, the president signed the new constitutional tribunal bills into law and appointed Przyłębska as acting president, who immediately recognized the three disputed judges. A tribunal meeting then nominated two of the "new" judges, including Przyłębska, whom President Duda confirmed as the new tribunal president. Although the "old" judges still argued that any nominees required the support of the tribunal majority, they subsequently accepted her appointment.

Internationally, this crisis has not served Poland well. On June 1, 2016, the EU Commission, which had been in discussion with the Polish government since January 13, took the unprecedented step of issuing a rule of law opinion, which could ultimately lead to the imposition of sanctions on Poland under Article 7 of the Treaty on the European Union. This may include the suspension of certain rights, including the voting rights of that country in the European Council, because of "the existence of a serious and persistent breach" of the Union's values, including the Rule of Law. Vice-president of the European Commission, Frans Timmermans, said that despite the commission's "best efforts," no solution regarding Poland's Constitutional Tribunal stalemate had been found.<sup>3</sup>

At the end of December 2016, it gave Warsaw two months to implement its earlier recommendations and to respond to additional concerns that there were no provisions in the Polish Constitution for the appointment of an acting president of the Tribunal. It called for the tribunal to review the constitutionality of the new laws. The Polish government questioned the legality of the commission's proce-

<sup>3</sup> European Commission, "Opening Remarks of First Vice-President Frans Timmermans—Press Conference on Rule of Law in Poland," June 1, 2016, [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_SPEECH-16-2023\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-16-2023_en.htm).

ture, arguing that it was based on non-treaty practices invented by officials, and that it could challenge it in the European Court of Justice. The only option that the commission has now is to propose sanctions under Article 7 of the EU treaty, but this requires unanimity in the European Council, and the Hungarian government, for one, has made it clear that it will veto any such measures.

The Constitutional Tribunal has, according to the opposition, been taken over illegally and packed with political appointees. Supporters of PiS contend that these changes will allow the tribunal to function normally and not as a tool of the opposition. Having traced the changes in this essay, it is hard to conclude that these have caused an existential crisis for the rule of law in Poland. The changes effected by PiS may have involved some dubious maneuvering, but they were carried out through parliament, and the constitution does allow parliament to set the operating procedures of the tribunal. Since the passage of time would have given PiS the judges it wanted anyway, it is even more difficult to characterize these changes as constituting a major constitutional crisis.

Their greater significance is as part of a wider unease over the government's rapid drive to gain power over all areas of Poland's public life: the state-owned media, the civil service, and with new (and potentially far-reaching) surveillance and security powers going further than ever before, including changes to the way the judicial commission appoints judges to other courts. The Constitutional Tribunal is no longer the public's focal point of political conflict, and while many had serious misgivings, the issues were, perhaps, too abstract for most Poles who have more pressing concerns. For many, PiS seems far more in tune with their opinion than the opposition. Conflict, yes; crisis no.

The changes after July 2017 included three bills, which call for the forced retirement of the judges of the Supreme Court (not to be confused with Constitutional Tribunal), though it leaves open the possibility of their reinstatement only with the approval of the minister of justice. These bills would make the minister of justice solely responsible for appointing the heads of district and appeals courts, and change the composition of judicial commission, which appoints judges to other courts by giving politicians the majority. These moves

over judicial independence reawoke fears that the rule of law Poland was in danger. Laws could be passed and applied with no independent scrutiny simply because, at each stage of the process, from deciding on the constitutionality of a law to the application of laws in citizens' lives, judges would owe their appointment to one political party. What started as a conflict will, if the latest changes move forward, become a crisis.

## **FOREIGN RELATIONS IN THE AGE OF KACZYŃSKI**

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JAN MUŚ

Jarosław Kaczyński, the undisputed head of the Law and Justice (PiS) party and the most influential politician in the country, is an example of a leader for whom foreign policy constitutes only a blurred background to domestic affairs. It is not a place, nor my intent to decide here whether he is right or wrong here. His approach however has had its consequences.

Underestimating international relations, the international community, and institutions has been very costly for Kaczyński during his conflict with the Constitutional Tribunal, PiS's takeover of the public media, and the more recent judiciary reform. His ignorance of the personal connections between the main opposition party Civic Platform (PO) MEPs in the European Parliament and the European Commission transformed what he believed to be merely a minor constitutional re-regulation into a crusade against democracy and the rule of law. A refreshing and bold approach to European integration and international relations in general have been overshadowed by this lack of international experience. This has exposed PiS's lack of contacts, and even fewer friends, in Brussels, Berlin, and Washington, and their vague understanding of EU complexity, making him an uneasy partner in the EU and an intellectually and conceptually entrenched adversary in relations with Russia.

## THE BROADER SCOPE

Although some claim that Warsaw is the Paris of the North (and I claim that Paris is the Warsaw of the West), Poland and the Western World have experienced substantially different circumstances leading to the shaping of their modern foreign policies. As such, it is advisable for the foreign reader to look at the broader context before going into the details. Poland's social structure and international position is quite different than those of France or Norway, after all.

The foreign policy of a number of "middle-weight" European states has historically been determined—whether they liked it or not—by more powerful neighbors. For Finland and the Baltic States, it was Sweden, Russia, and, to a lesser degree, Poland; for Slovakia it was Hungary; for Hungary and Serbia it was the Ottoman and Habsburg empires; for Belgium and the Netherlands it was Germany and France; for Portugal it was England and Spain.

What frames Polish foreign policy is the Berlin–Moscow axis and the proximity of these two powerful and ambitious states. The two world empires, that is, great powers, have directly threatened the very existence of the Polish state and the Polish nation itself at many points in the past. Consequently, any politician, whether liberal, social democratic, conservative, green, red, or yellow, populist or non-populist is forced to take this into consideration.

When Poles talk with China, it is always with an eye on relations with Moscow; when they speak with Washington, then the discussion is about the potential threat from the East and lack of support among Poland's Western European allies. Strengthening ties with (or not antagonizing) Poland's northern neighbors on the Baltic Sea and southeastern Europe is always aimed at changing the balance in relations between Berlin and Moscow. Throughout history, Poland—more or less actively and with varying levels of formality and utilization of various available or imaginary tools—has played this precarious game, and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

Since the transformation of 1989, the fall of the Eastern Bloc, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Poland has chosen the path of Euro-Atlantic integration. Polish elites and the majority of society see themselves as Europeans, and, if asked, say they have a Western

rather than Eastern character. This means not only that Soviet domination is no more, but also that the idea of equidistance between Berlin and Moscow has been jettisoned, and Poland has joined Western structures.

Poland's early determination resulted in its relatively quick and full integration with NATO in 1999 and with the European Union five years later. Membership in various other regional and/or Western-oriented and orchestrated organizations also followed, such as the Council of Europe (1991), the Council of Baltic Sea States (1991), the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (1996), the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (1995) and the World Trade Organization (1995). This progress has been steady and the direction always clear. Poles were full of enthusiasm and pride in re-joining the European family. Poland has also been a forerunner and an example for other emerging countries in the post-Cold war order.

Since the Napoleonic wars, the West, especially via alliances with France and the United Kingdom and later with the United States, has been perceived as a guarantor of Polish sovereignty and independence (sometimes with rather blurry outlines, for example, the never forgotten month of September 1939). Apart from its formal participation in international bodies, Poland has also proved itself to be a loyal and devoted ally of the United States and a determined NATO member. Interventions in Iraq in 1991 and Haiti in 1994, Yugoslavia in the 1990s, Afghanistan in 2001, and then again in Iraq in 2003 were accompanied by visible Polish expeditionary forces or significant military support that took other forms, and as Poles were about to realize, these missions were never fully in line with specific and direct Polish interests.

For twenty-five years—including the years of the administration of Jarosław Kaczyński and his people—Poland saw major changes in its geopolitical situation, most importantly since 1989, when Germany changed its position from existential threat to patron of Polish integration with the West. Thus, the only remaining adversary on the international scene remained Russia.

## ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT

The years preceding PiS's electoral victories in 2015 were peculiar for Polish-German relations and the position of Poland in the EU. Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska*, or PO) established close relations with Germany under Angela Merkel's Christian Democrats (CDU). The bad taste left after Gerhard Schroeder's open and naïve pro-Russian stance was immediately removed with the arrival of the new leadership in Berlin.

German Conservatives and Christian Democrats have always tended to look upon Poland in more favorable colors than the Social Democrats in Germany and elsewhere in Europe. The tolerant stance of leftist European parties towards the Soviet Union and later towards Russia aroused a lot of suspicion and anxiety in Poland. So Merkel has been very welcome in Warsaw, and indeed before PiS's electoral triumph, Polish-German relations reached an unknown level of political coordination and mutually beneficial economic exchange.

Poland has become a larger importer of German goods than Russia, with \$47.5 billion, or 3.8 percent of overall exports, versus Russia's \$22.4 billion and 1.8 percent respectively in 2015.<sup>1</sup> For a country like Germany, whose economy is based on exports, these are more than just statistics. Since the 1990s, Poland's economic development and political stability became an important factor in Berlin's planning. The wealthier Poland is, the more German products its population can buy. A stable Poland is one in which more German investments can be made, creating more jobs, and resulting in the development of infrastructure, etc.

This symbiosis between Poland and Germany has been subject to an analysis by Konrad Popławski from the Center for Eastern Studies (OSW): "The role of Central Europe in the German Economy: Political consequences."<sup>2</sup> Data concerning production and trade are no secret. Merkel knows and appreciates the role of Central European

<sup>1</sup> Data from the Harvard Observatory of Economic Complexity: <https://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/deu/>, accessed in 8 February 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Konrad Popławski, *The Role of Central Europe in the German Economy: The Political Consequences*, OSW Report, (Warsaw: Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia, 2016), [https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/report\\_role-ce\\_2.pdf](https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/report_role-ce_2.pdf).

economies (including the biggest one—Polish) in German growth. Kaczyński knows it too. Therefore, his anti-German rhetoric perhaps falls under the adage: “The dogs are barking, but the caravan keeps rolling.” Berlin does not want to “lose” Poland and Poland does not want to lose access to European funds. So far, so good. A win-win situation for both sides.

To complete the picture we should, however, explain one thing. Kaczyński perceives foreign policy and international relations in darker colors than many liberals. In fact, knowingly or not, he is much closer to Immanuel Wallerstein and his neo-colonialist interpretation<sup>3</sup> than to the neoliberalism of Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye.<sup>4</sup> His world is comprised of centers—or core-countries—such as Germany, and peripheries and semi-peripheries like Poland, for example. The latter are subordinated to the former, sometimes voluntarily sometimes not, but (semi-)peripheries always find themselves in a disadvantaged position, just as Poland and other CEE countries find themselves vis-à-vis the Western core.

While for Donald Tusk and his liberals the EU project has been a win-win game, notably when GDP and Poland’s international trade were rising, Kaczyński’s view is dominated by Poles working for German capital. Thus, core countries claim most of the benefits, and Kaczyński was elected to change this distribution of income in the international sphere. The message Kaczyński sends is that the EU game, and especially Polish-German relations, should be maintained, but—and crucially—on different terms, since, according to his logic, some countries (i.e., Germany) earn more from these relationships than others (newcomers such as Poland).

This greater assertiveness in foreign policy reflects, in the eyes of PiS, state sovereignty rather than any nationalistic sentiment. Despite

<sup>3</sup> Rich and powerful countries exploit weaker ones. See for example Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), together with Randall Collins, Michael Mann, Georgi Derluguian, and Craig Calhoun, *Does Capitalism Have a Future?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Everybody benefits from the cooperation. See for example, Robert E. Keohane with Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition* (New York: Little, Brown, 1977), or *Power and Interdependence in a Partially Globalized World* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World’s Only Superpower Can’t Go it Alone* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).



widespread media criticism of Kaczyński and his government, it is difficult to find any genuine chauvinist or nationalistic approach in their international dealings. PiS has, in fact, been taken aback by the negative press coverage it has received abroad. The party leadership does not see its actions as deviating from European standards. It is PO that sold itself too cheaply and then failed to redistribute EU funds in a way that facilitated sustainable development, they reason. Therefore, PiS cannot be described as an anti-EU party or be compared with populist anti-EU movements in other countries.

PiS's thinking on the European Union, EU institutions, and Brexit has been determined by a perceived necessity to strengthen Poland's security, domestic economy, and social development. Kaczyński, Foreign Minister Jacek Czaputowicz, and the Vice-Minister for European Affairs, Konrad Szymański are fully aware of the significance of the EU for Polish social and economic development and its successful integration with Western Europe, and in their statements they have made clear that they hope for the strengthening of the EU. However, its shape should be based on an intergovernmental rather than a communitarian model, according to which the particular member states are more likely to defend their sovereign rights. It is Donald Tusk who exposed Poland to extensive and avoidable losses by following the "wrong" logic of international cooperation and European integration. Therefore, he should not represent Polish interest in the EU.

This stance has been strengthened by the European Commission's involvement in the dispute over Poland's Constitutional Tribunal. According to the PiS leadership, the commission fails to take into account the interests of the EU as a whole, but rather its biggest players—the economic and political core of the united Europe. This is quite odd, since the weak, small, or poor countries, i.e., the new member states, supported communitarian institutions in principle, as they believed that these were best able to protect their interest against players such as France, the UK, Germany, and the Netherlands. The European Parliament's and the Commission's role is specifically to take into account the interests of the EU as a whole; intergovernmental institutions represent a more atomized and egoistic approach to European integration. However, since the Commission is not, in

the eyes of PiS, working in the interests of the “smaller” members, it has been rejected by the new government in Warsaw.

This sort of allergy to EU institutions has been reinforced with the high voter turnout for PiS during the election of Donald Tusk to the position of the President of the European Council. For PiS, Tusk represented neither the interests of the EU as a whole (as a neutral President of an important EU body), nor of Poland specifically, but only of his personal political interests as a future President of Poland. The significant shift in the ideological paradigm concerning foreign policy also resulted in what some commentators in the West have over-exaggeratedly called a “purge” of diplomats, who, let’s face it, were sent to well-paid retirements instead of jobs cutting taiga in temperatures of minus thirty degrees Celsius.

For the same reasons, the moderate liberal policy of the previous PO government should be disregarded as being weak and submissive. Kaczyński does not want ongoing Polish-German relations to be sabotaged and for Poland to be thrown out of the EU. He wants a reformulation that would provide Poland with more benefits than the current set-up. How to achieve this, and whether it is possible at all, are obviously another story. But Kaczyński’s Western world is much more “realist” and “imperialist” than “liberal,” that much is clear. For PiS, the issue of immigrants from Africa and the Middle East was not a matter of European solidarity, but, instead, of the Western responsibility for their short-sighted migration policy and overseas economic, political, and military engagement. Why should Poles pay for French uranium mines in Niger or for BP investments in the Middle East? Furthermore, it must be added that, over the past few years, Poland welcomed over two million (or 5% of overall society of Poland) Ukrainian immigrants, a fact that often escapes public attention in the West.

PiS also shares another feature of the Wallersteinian approach, namely, the love of history. Expressions such as “history will judge us,” or “history is the best judge,” indicate a commonality with historical materialism, emphasizing as it does the need for a wider, historical view of contemporary international relations. This is, again, clear in Kaczyński’s approach to the question of European integration and the role of the big players in it. The “historical” approach to for-

eign and domestic policy has one obviously negative consequence: leaders who are responsible to history (and ultimately perhaps to God) and not to their citizens and their international obligations are much less predictable.

### THE EAST AND KACZYŃSKI'S DUALITY

At the end of the day, however, for good or ill, the West has been a settled question in Polish policy. Poland is in the EU and NATO. It has secured its borders, and the character of Polish-German relations remains the only key issue to be fully resolved.

The main challenge to Polish international security remains, however, in the east. The arrival of Vladimir Putin on the political scene has shown Russia to be a challenging, demanding, and unpredictable adversary in international relations. Popular gossip claims that the Kaczyński brothers lost any faith they may have had in their neighbors after Germany and Russia signed the agreement for the North Stream (I) project without including Poland. For any Polish leader, an agreement between these two neighbors that ignores Polish interests is seen as a direct threat, and will evoke bad dreams of the Polish partitions of the eighteenth century, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Agreement of 1939, and the Yalta Accords of 1944, when Poland's fate was sealed somewhere and by someone else.

What is striking here is the fact that Kaczyński has two different visions of international relations, one for the West and one for the East. In relations with the West, Poland is the subject of economic and political subordination that limits its sovereignty. With regard to the East, the approach to Russia and the former Soviet Republics is characterized by a liberal or even, as pointed out by professor Jacek Czaputowicz, an idealistic attitude, with the central role played by legal and ethical norms, international law, and organizations. The West, according to the general logic of PiS, is "using" Poland, but Poland (as an EU member) wants to "democratize" Ukraine. In other words, the imposition of values, economic programs, and institutional solutions, to which Poland is subject if not a victim, is not only acceptable in Kiev and Minsk, but even desired and expected.

**SUBSTANTIALLY ANTI-RUSSIAN?**

Strong anti-Russian rhetoric is further conditioned by two factors. The first is the strong anticommunist character of PiS. Russia in Poland equals communism and imperialism at the same time, both in its Stalinist form. The rhetoric of PiS has a strongly anticommunist character: it is based on the condemnation of communism and also the 1989 transformation period away from it, which, in the opinion of Kaczyński, was not anticommunist enough. Lech Wałęsa, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Bronisław Geremek, and Jacek Kuroń should have been tougher and far less forgiving.<sup>5</sup> PiS believes that the Round Table talks of 1989, where communist elites met with democratic opposition leaders and agreed on a peaceful transformation, should be the subject of criminal proceedings. The communists should be held responsible for the killings, unlawful imprisonments, breaches of human and political rights, discrimination, and persecution of opposition members, as well as crimes against the Polish nation, the Catholic Church and the Polish state (in that order). Moscow was directly responsible, they believe. For PiS and its supporters, the Russian state (though not its people or culture!) is an aggressive, rogue state, and, to paraphrase George Bush, an evil state.

The wounds inflicted by the Germans during World War Two have been partially healed. German leaders have apologized for the horrors of the war. After recognizing its eastern border in 1990 (!), Germany supported Polish integration into NATO and the EU. What is left to be settled is the scale of reparations and the share of the EU cake that Poland can grab. According to Kaczyński's logic, Russian responsibility for crimes against Poland has never been subject to international or even bilateral focus, at least not on a scale and in a way desired by Kaczyński, that is. So, on the one hand, there is strong anti-communist and anti-Kremlin rhetoric, which helped lift Kaczyński into power, but on the other, there is still a strong and aggressive Russia that does not want to apologize for fifty years of Polish occupation and its imperialist behavior.

<sup>5</sup> Leaders of the 1989 peaceful transformation.

**AND THEN THERE IS MR. PUTIN**

The Russian President Vladimir Putin is somebody who is feared, hated, and admired at the same time in the Polish presidential palace. His arrival on the political scene coincided with Poland's dreams of "civilizing" Russia and subduing the Kremlin to the Western (i.e., Polish) will. With Putin, Russia became an obsession of PiS elites. The war against Georgia in 2008 showed that Russia would not refrain from using military action in its foreign policy. President Lech Kaczyński flew to Georgia, despite the ongoing military operations, to show solidarity with the Georgian nation and, more importantly, to impress on Polish public opinion that he was a strong statesman, leader, and man of action, rather than a frightened and office-bound political mediocrity. This Caucasian adventure brought nothing except some gratitude from the then President of Georgia, Michael Saakashvili, and a bit of press coverage in Poland and other Eastern European countries. Once more, if only fleetingly, Poland became the messiah of the nations. In the PiS bunker, the image could not be clearer: we are the only country that can stand against Russian imperialism and Putin's territorial ambitions. This short-lived glory led to a deterioration of already tense relations with Moscow.

**ANOTHER VICTIM OF THE SMOLEŃSK CATASTROPHE**

The plane crash at Smoleńsk in 2010 further complicated relations with Russia. Although signs of sympathies sent by Russian citizens made a good impression in Poland, the Kremlin's initial willingness to collaborate on the issue quickly morphed into another political game in which Poles lost their nerve, and hence, also the game.

The crash wreckage has still not been returned to Poland, and Jarosław Kaczyński must see this as both a personal insult and a political challenge. But the catastrophe also served as a weapon aimed against PO during both the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2015. PiS indicated that PO was not doing enough to get back the wreckage, and that it could not satisfactorily answer the question "what happened in Smoleńsk?" But this now also puts Kaczyński in an

extremely difficult position. Poland cannot do much about the wreckage after all. The previous rhetoric of PiS means that the new government has to answer every little Russian provocation. This, in turn, leads to a situation in which Poland's image as being "over-allergic to Russia" is becoming increasingly visible to its Western NATO allies. Kaczyński seems to be increasingly unable or unprepared to separate private from public; family business from political and international affairs. The Russians know it; the Americans know it; the Germans know it; even the author of this text knows it. As such, it makes Kaczyński the prey than the hunter.

#### THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW

Crimea, Donbas, and earlier Ossetia and Abkhazia leave no doubt about the character of Russian foreign policy. What was surprising was the tempo of the conflict's escalation and the "punch-for-a-punch" stance adopted by the former KGB officers now in the Kremlin. One should recall that, in fact, Kaczyński adopted his anti-Russian stance before the EU and financial crises, but some years later, the world is a very different place. Poland finds itself in a difficult relationship with a country that—as a Western commentator once put it—behaves like a drunk soldier in a brothel. PiS obviously cannot withdraw from this relationship, but it does not have any idea how to approach the Russian question constructively and effectively.

A crucial shift, however, was seen in the ideological paradigms shaping foreign policy. Tensions with the Commission and the European Parliament, the election of Donald Tusk, on the one hand, and the clear benefits of the EU membership on the other, indicate that PiS wants (if it has to) a deeper union. But the depth should be based on the intergovernmental approach rather than strengthening common EU institutions.

This also opens up the question of how Poland's EU partners will interpret PiS's stance and behavior within the EU and in international relations. Will PiS leaders learn some of the codes that would enable them to function effectively in Brussels and Berlin? Will they produce arguments strong enough to convince their partners, or will they

simply veto any decision that is not in line with their interests? The EU's crucial role in Poland's future development and stability has been acknowledged, as has the need for EU reform. PiS and Kaczyński could prove to be constructive voices or a Trojan horse of populism. But it is ultimately the reactions of Berlin, Paris, London, and other European capitals that will answer this question.





PART II

## **PiS'S POLITICS OF HISTORY**



## THE NEW ROMANTICS

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JOANNA ŚREDNICKA

It is typical and tempting to associate Polish political culture with its socialist past, that is, its fifty years as part of the Soviet empire. But many aspects of Polish political life, and Law and Justice's (PiS) actions and narrative in particular, are actually rooted in a much earlier time, the nineteenth century.

Insubordination, the lack of solidarity, continuous free riding, and rebellions against EU policies can be read as manifestations of Polish Romanticism. Romanticism, which in Europe was a fleeting and intense shock, a short period of "Sturm and Drang,"<sup>1</sup> a brief emotional reaction to the Enlightenment cult of reason and rationality, was in Poland—due to the political situation and the loss of independence for nearly two centuries—not so fleeting. Its unique strength and form imbued Polish culture with an aggressive and provocative attitude, the desire for confrontation, subjective and selective retreat to morality, and the strong concept of "for the good of the nation." These dimensions remained latent in times of peace, but they are always ready to be stirred up again at any moment.

To illustrate how strongly and deeply Romanticism permeates Polish culture, I use a "case study" from the world of international business organizations, perhaps the last place one would expect to see romanticism. At the micro level, by looking at the actions of managers and tracking them back to elements of nineteenth-century romantic sensibility, I aim to outline a broader cultural context, and shed new light on PiS's narratives and behavior. Listening to the stories told by employees in corporations operating in Poland, like ob-

<sup>1</sup> 1774 marked the first publication of *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, Goethe's novel, which is considered the beginning of the European *Sturm und Drang* period.

serving some of PiS's behavior and attitudes, is like stepping into the pages of Romantic or post-Romantic literature—Mickiewicz's<sup>2</sup> poetry or Prus's *Doll*.<sup>3</sup> They read like stories about capitalism transforming Polish nineteenth-century social reality.

Before describing four dominant myths, which appear in organizational and socio-political life, I will discuss two contradictory tendencies underlying the specific role that romanticism plays in Polish social life, specifically in business and political culture. The first is the importance of patriotic literature and education in building national identity and pride, raising new generations of patriots, establishing specific moral standards and dominant sensibility. The second is the ideals of Western-style modernization based on strong negation and severe criticism by progressive and liberal intellectual elites who define all aspects of this romantic legacy.

For decades, the interplay between these two tendencies has shaped the way Poles behave and feel. After the dominance of the pro-European, economically liberal, elitist vision of modernization under the rule of Platforma Obywatelska (Civic Platform, PO), the reversal to PiS-favoring tendencies was felt even more strongly, strengthening a nostalgic glance back into the past, and reawaking a few romantic myths: of the homeland as a besieged fortress; of lonely freedom fighters and guerillas; but also of nostalgia for the past and the messianic vision of the Polish nation transforming a European morality under threat.

<sup>2</sup> Mickiewicz, Adam (1798–1855): a poet, dramatist, essayist, publicist, translator, professor of Slavic literature, and political activist. He is regarded as the national poet in Poland, Lithuania, and Belarus. A principal figure in Polish Romanticism, He is best known for the poetic drama *Dziady* (*Forefathers' Eve*), and the national epic poem *Pan Tadeusz*.

<sup>3</sup> Prus, Bolesław (1847–1912): a leading and definitive figure in the history of Polish literature. A writer, essayist, and journalist. In *The Doll*, he depicts life of Warsaw, under Russian rule in the late 1870s as a vibrant panorama of social conflict, political tensions, and personal suffering: the embattled aristocracy, the new men of finance, Dickensian tradesmen, and the urban poor.

**"WHY DO POLES ALWAYS DO EVERYTHING THEIR OWN WAY?"**

In the international organizations that I study and refer to below, these myths live on, interestingly mixing with capitalist rules and Western individualism, creating a fascinating new mythology.

"Why do Poles always do everything their own way?" a Dutch manager once asked me. Henk was working for a large software company with a branch in Poland. From his perspective, the work of Polish managers went as follows: long hours of meetings full of heated discussions, followed by quick conclusions and nodded confirmations. A nice dinner would follow, and at the end, they all would say goodbye and drift home. What comes after is the most interesting part: the Czechs would do what had been agreed on; the Lithuanians too . . . and the Poles, oh well. First, you lose contact with them and emails discarded, and then it seems that everything winds up being done differently: in their way. During my several-month long ethnographic research in various Polish companies,<sup>4</sup> I came across a similar phenomenon of serial insubordination that I call "micro-romantic uprisings."

It was not easy to explain to Henk what Polish romanticism is about; that for many decades, intellectual life simply moved into the realm of literature that has shaped, if not determined, our political and business culture for centuries. It is, in fact, hard to imagine Polishness without patriotic poets whose creations have tortured successive generations of high school graduates. During the industrial revolution when a second wave of modern Western society was emerging, Poles focused on independence and conspiracy, but most often theoretically. Of course, most lived in the quiet rhythm of crop rotation, so no need to worry their heads about independence. But we are talking here about those who set the standards.

Although in 1989, Maria Janion<sup>5</sup>, the leading scholar of Polish romantic culture, announced its definitive end, a few years later she

<sup>4</sup> I refer here mainly to wide, long term, in-depth ethnographic study in one of the Polish production companies where I conducted research between 2011–15 and several minor studies carried out in various Polish organizations for the last ten years.

<sup>5</sup> Janion, Maria: a Polish scholar, critic, theoretician of literature. A Professor specializing in Romanticism at the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

softened her diagnosis, admitting that the Warsaw Uprising (1944) and Solidarity movement may not have been the last in a line of romantic uprisings. Such romantic revolts still occur, she suggested, although on a smaller scale. I witnessed some of them in the company where I conducted my ethnographic work with Henk and his relations with his Polish counterparts. I also saw it in my everyday work with managers from a variety of different industries and types of organizations. It took the form of managers taking up guerrilla warfare in the name of values, and directors of factories hiding real data to defend local interests with a nostalgic glance at their predecessors. One can detect very similar patterns in PIS attitudes and actions regarding EU: a continuous willingness to engage in rebellion and resistance mixed with annoying arrogance, nationalism, and sense of superiority. Whether we like it or not, this specific latent form of Polish romanticism can be awakened when one least expects it.

#### ROMANTIC SPIRITS: THE ROLE OF LITERATURE

The specific position of romanticism in Polish culture is usually explained by history.<sup>6</sup> The defeat of Napoleon and the November Uprising (1831), which eventually buried the hopes of any imminent recovery of lost independence, caused the Polish romantic spirit to be permanently embedded.<sup>7</sup> The main questions asked by Polish intellec-

<sup>6</sup> For example, Marcin Król, *Romantyzm—piekło i niebo Polaków* (Warszawa: Fundacja "Res Publica," 1998).

Król, Marcin, Feliks: a leading Polish professor of philosophy, historian of ideas; a researcher and editor.

A. Walicki, *Trzy patriotyzmy. Trzy tradycje polskiego patriotyzmu i ich znaczenie współczesne* (Warszawa: Res Publica, 1991). Walicki Andrzej: a Polish historian. He was a professor specializing in philosophy of sociopolitics, history of Polish and Russian philosophy, Marxism and liberal thought at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana, United States.

<sup>7</sup> 1772, 1793, 1795: The Partitions of Poland (by the Russian Empire, the Kingdom of Prussia, and the Habsburg Empire). Gradually the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth ceased to exist. After a series of unsuccessful uprisings (in 1794, the Kosciuszko Uprising; 1803–15, the Napoleonic Wars with Polish legions driven by hopes for an independent Poland; and 1830–31, the November Uprising (Cadet War) against the Russian Empire). These uprisings initiated the Great Emigration (1831–1970) and the emigration of thousands of Poles, particularly from the political and cultural elites, who, for few decades, circulated among Europe's salons.

tuals circulating in Europe's salons after the November defeat remained the same for few decades: can the Poles regain their independence?

While revolutionary activities were imbued with the essence of European Romanticism, the special form of the Polish version emerged in the absence of a sovereign state with an open forum for the exchange of ideas and discussion of political issues important to the community. The nation moved into the field of art, especially poetry and literature. Political life bloomed in a crystallized form in the spiritual realm, and projects for the homeland, including a future social order, were born on the desks of philosophers, poets, and other "spiritual guides of the nation." Polish patriotism, in effect, took the form of an idealized love for a spiritual heritage and the ideal of military service to the nation. But there were actually two romanticisms. Besides the elite version, in which poetry and art served as philosophers, artists, and journalists' substitutes for parliament, there grew up a second, much more powerful version, which was a lower, simplified, operative romanticism ("service and read"), which subordinated everything to the national cause. This version, deprived of any depth of romantic sensibility, became the source of many myths. A patriotic poetry has gradually become a stereotype, divested of its original and typically romantic existential dimension. It has been identified with uniform religious-patriotic feelings, in which the poet is awarded the role of spiritual guide of the nation. Simply put, literature was method of building national identity and educating new generations of patriots. If, as a patriot, one does not follow the canon of values, feelings, and attitudes, then one is not a Pole.

#### **(ANTI-)ROMANTIC MODERNIZATION**

Sociologists (e.g., Anna Giza)<sup>8</sup> suggest that this forced transfer of political reality to the world of perfect vision changed the course of the modernization process, for many decades distinguishing this part of Europe from the West. While the Western middle class could affect certain patterns of social behavior through various domains of socio-

<sup>8</sup> A. Giza, *Gabinet Luster. O kształtowaniu samowiedzy Polaków w dyskursie publicznym* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2013).

economic life—the organization of workplace for example—the training of the Polish intelligentsia was limited mainly to culture and literature, providing a deeply patriotic education. Upgraded to the rank of national unity, this in turn flattened tensions and slowed down the emancipation processes of various social groups. The national liberation struggle shaded all other claims.

In response, since the early twentieth century, breaking out this regressive romantic heritage became the overriding goal for generations of Western-oriented intellectual elites. In 1989, as with the previous two great shifts in Polish society faced (1918 and 1945),<sup>9</sup> the nation needed to rebuild a new legal and institutional order from scratch. And this time, reconstruction would be civil, open, and autonomous, with the Western modernization project as a clear model to aspire to. For the elites, the construction of civil society became a mission. Citizens not only had to actively seek to enrich themselves and grow the economy; they also had to transform the community according to the pattern of Western modernization, shedding outdated traditionalism, with the romantic tradition at the very top of the list. As a result, both sides—pro-modernization and conservative Poles—developed evaluative discourses that reached into the simplest mechanisms of the ideological struggle. One side condemned the parochialism of the “*bogojczyźnianych mocherów*,”<sup>10</sup> while the other denounced the other for selling out the nation. Both paternalistically nominated their heroes and created laundry lists of exemplary behaviors.

<sup>9</sup> 1918 is the year in which Poland's sovereignty as the Second Polish Republic was restored after one hundred twenty-three years of partition.

<sup>10</sup> “Bogojczyźniane mohery” refers to traditional, religious, and nationalistic (“patriotic”) elderly people. Bogojczyźniany is an adjective used to describe someone who is both very religious (Catholic) and patriotic in a slightly nationalistic way. Bóg: God and Ojczyzna: Fatherland. Mohair refers to a popular ironic term to describe a very traditional, elderly, religious person (refers to women who listen to Radio Maria religiously and who love to wear berets made of mohair).



**ROMANTIC MYTHS IN BUSINESS ORGANIZATIONS**

In international organizations with business practices that appear far from such ideologies and political disputes, there was a real civilization change taking place. However, Romantic myths did not disappear, but mingled with capitalist rules and Western individualism. For the first time in a very long time, it was not in the offices of philosophers and on the pages of poetry that collective tensions and conflicts could be played out. Romanticism emerged in new guises in managerial roles. I will take a closer look at four of them, which both repeatedly come alive in business organizations, but also seem to play an important role in PiS activities and attitudes: (1) the myth of deserved and honestly earned freedom, (2) the homeland as a besieged fortress and guerilla warfare that revives with the first signs of a threat to freedom, (3) the idea of Arcadia and a nostalgic return to the past as the passive face of the guerrilla myth, (4) the civilizational mission of Poland toward both West and East.

**FREEDOM TO BE GAINED**

The typical (business) romantics are those born between 1965 and 1980, who today are forty to fifty years old. They started their careers in the early 1990s, and were educated domestically, although some hold international MBAs. They all have some entrepreneurial experience, creating something from nothing, in their biographies: opening new branches of Western companies, building new structures or introducing new products to the market. They are specialists, they are effective, engaged, and well educated, a world away from the PRL (communist times). Their careers may have developed because many Polish production plants received huge cash infusions from foreign investors in the 1990s, receiving an unprecedented possibility to create, develop, and achieve career glory. And depending on the model of privatization, a local management team would get more or less independence. The “expat” model meant that the key role was played by envoys sent from foreign headquarters, and, as many studies show, this

“colonial” approach tended to trigger immediate resistance among local managers and employees.<sup>11</sup>

In the “federated” model, all responsibility was in the hands of a local team, as in the case of one of the companies I studied. A production plant had been bought via privatization by a Scandinavian investor, who decided to invest not only in production lines, but also in the managerial skills of the local team. In response, managers naturally tended to have a sense enormous freedom, independence, community, and ownership, rather than feeling colonized. They voluntarily accepted a higher standard of business culture, adopted new practices, and acquired new knowledge, technologies, and methods of organizing work. Smoothly and in good faith, they moved onto the path of Western modernization, just as Poland did, which eventually led to its accession to the European Union.

Most interestingly, employees strongly believe that history was not fixed, that it could have developed differently. They could have been colonized, they could have failed to gain independence. For (both political and business) romantics, freedom and independence are never completely obvious, not given. In the stories told within the organization, the factory was initially supposed to become just a cheap production base, a supply outpost for the West, similar to euro-skeptics’ narrative about Poland. The fact that the plant wound up developing into a well-known brand not only in Poland, but also within the corporate group, was not a result of investor intention. Rather it was the fruit of a specific strategy and the hard work and the long-term struggle of Polish CEOs, managers, and employees.

The romantic theme of gaining freedom comes back here in a story of striving for an independent and prosperous Polish corporate branch; the story of deserved and earned recognition. Investors should not expect any gratitude.

<sup>11</sup> Graham Hollinshead and S. Michailova, “Blockbusters or Bridge-Builders? The Role of Western Trainers in Developing New Entrepreneurialism in Eastern Europe,” *Management Learning* 32, no. 4 (2001): 419–36.

## FREEDOM FIGHTERS

Independence is not either given once and for all, and it must always be fought for. The romantics know that freedom is something very fragile.

When the company fell into the hands of a profit-seeking investment fund for the first time in 2000, its fight for independence was brought into question, and the romantic tradition offered several response methods. The most obvious was the reemergence of guerrilla warfare: underground resistance to any change regarded as harmful to the local organization. The company's partisans effortlessly transformed themselves into a well-organized underground state. The CEO, managers, and senior staff coordinate themselves against hostile external forces, in the name—they believe—of the greater good. Michał, the director of product development, says, for example: "I welcome the opportunity to prove that I had the right to challenge the corporate colossus, especially in a situation where becoming a guerrilla, I admit, sometimes gave me an additional element of satisfaction. It is as if I can do things better than the corporate idiots."

Like Konrad Wallenrod,<sup>12</sup> the hero from a poem by Mickiewicz, the employees must and can act in the gap between noble ideals and prosaic methods in the name of a higher value. It is a kind of tragic situation. To accomplish lofty goals, one sometimes uses means that conflict with one's own moral code. Many managers talked about guerrilla activities, sometimes in spite of corporate rules and regulations. In the name of continuity, they bypass procedures. Michał is aware that this mode of action is breaking all the rules. "If the president of the corporation saw what I do every day, he would take an axe to my head."

The idea of the besieged fortress and the homeland's demand for a fight for freedom is one of the strongest myths in Polish culture, and apparently, it still ready to be roused in business and political contexts.

<sup>12</sup> *Konrad Wallenrod* is a narrative poem written in Polish by Adam Mickiewicz. Wallenrod is a fictional Lithuanian pagan captured and reared as a Christian by his people's long-standing enemies, the Order of Teutonic Knights. He rises to the position of Grand Master, and when he is awakened to his heritage, he seeks vengeance by deliberately leading the Knights into a major military defeat.

Polish romanticism is symbolized by the transformation of Gustav in Mickiewicz's *Dziady* (Forefathers' Eve). Crushed by a love that had broken all social conventions (a Polish equivalent of the Young Werther), Gustav—reborn as Konrad—starts fighting for his community and its freedom. This narrative demands: abandon your individual desires on the altar of the homeland.

#### PAST AND FUTURE: BETWEEN ARCADIA AND MIRACLES

But there is also another side of the guerrilla myth. Why not just let it go? The next crisis will come, the owner will change, or the company will be sold off for a quick profit anyway. Cyprian Kamil Norwid, one of Poland's nineteenth-century national prophets joked that Poles, as in Mickiewicz's national epic, "eat, drink, pick mushrooms, and wait until Napoleon comes and brings them their state."<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, a tired and embittered romantic can easily fall into apathy, living suspended somewhere between an Arcadian past and the possible future in anticipation of a miracle. They are a bit nonchalant about the future and full of a camouflaged optimism that sometimes rubs against a type of magical thinking, both of which help the romantic survive hard times. It does not make sense to fight; the war will eventually end, the invaders will leave, a new, better investor is always just around the corner, you just have to wait.

And a romantic soul can always escape to some inspiring, memorable past. As in the stories told in organizations, there are always some good times behind us, in the Arcadian<sup>14</sup> life that happened five, ten, fifteen or even seventy years earlier—as in case of PiS's historical policy. "In the company everything was as God had commanded," one employee said. The present is grim, but it is only temporary. A trained romantic has mastered an art of compensating the misery of

<sup>13</sup> Norwid, Cyprian Kamil (1821–83): A poet, dramatist, and painter regarded as one of the second generation of romantics. Norwid's original and non-conformist style was not appreciated in his lifetime, and his work was only rediscovered and appreciated in the twentieth century.

<sup>14</sup> Arcadia is a strong theme that penetrates Polish romantic poetry, with the best example Mickiewicz's epic poem *Pan Tadeusz*, in which he pictures an idealized, soothing vision of a green, harmonious homeland from the past.

now with the memories of a real or imagined past: the wonderful years of freedom, harmony, and happiness.

### MESSIANISM: BETWEEN WEST AND EAST

The soul of the romantic is also often mixed with a sense of moral superiority. The peripheral position to the West has been an important issue and a source of very typical tensions in the Polish national narrative for the last few centuries. National pride is interlaced with a sense of inferiority, and this deeply felt complex mixes with the messianic belief that Poles will bring the moral transformation of the West. The nineteenth-century messianism that exited the national stage relatively quickly in other European countries is still inherent and enthusiastically absorbed by the literary canon in Poland. Not surprisingly therefore, the same dynamic pops up in the company's history. The narrative smoothly shifted from praise for Western patterns and business culture in the early years to today's sense of self-worth, and maybe even moral superiority and a hint of megalomania. Soulless Western investment fund managers have definitively lost their role model function, the short-sighted strategy they convey has been rejected as incompatible with local ideals of long-term and organic growth. The concept of the moral renewal of corporate life brought by Polish managers comes up in many local stories. What is more, Polish managers do not even bother to hide their civilizational superiority over their Eastern neighbors, which is very much in line with similar dominant ideas in art, literature, and collective memory. The nostalgic myth of the borderlands tends to be one of an idyllic Arcadian Poland (sometimes armed), and often described as civilizing mission.

I believe that this journey to the world of business organization helps the reader visualize the strength of the romantic logic; recognize how deeply and organically it is rooted in Polish culture; and realize how difficult it might be to change or erase it. And keep in mind, managers and employees from different types of organizations are citizens and voters. Their rebellious souls, lined with an inferiority complex and past-orientation, together with a sense of civilizational superiority

to the East and a moral superiority to the West, constitute an important political context. The nineteenth-century behavioral scripts of freedom fighters embodied by an overwhelmingly patriotic education are apparently still alive and waiting to be activated at any moment.

Finally, the actions of PiS politicians in the European forum can also be easily decoded through the same cultural keys: romantic guerrilla warfare against European (Western) suppression, or European officials who have lost their moral legitimacy. Polish politicians and managers might be seen as products of the same romantic code. They are full of inconsistencies and complexes typical to peripheral or postcolonial societies, with a morbid desire for freedom and a shallowly dormant nostalgia for the past mixed with an aversion to every change perceived as imposed. Of course, they also mastered the art of both selectively picking out the most useful bits from the romantic reservoir and cynically irritating the most fragile romantic nerves to achieve their ad hoc political goals.

## THE HISTORY MEN

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JAN DARASZ

In Poland's culture wars, history has been weaponized. How the governing PiS and its supporters look at Poland's history is the subject of this chapter. It will look at why PiS feels it needs a historical policy and give a brief overview of the history that has shaped Poland's views of its own past. Then it will shine a spotlight on some of the aspects of daily and political life where history matters, especially in political discourse but more often in conflicts between PiS and its enemy, the postcommunist liberal chatterati at home and abroad.

The struggle between liberals and conservatives over history is not a contest of competing truths. PiS is no proponent of historical relativism. This is a battle for the truth, which will end in the establishment of a narrative of events and opinion about Polish history to be advocated at home and defended abroad.

Peter Geyl, writing in *Napoleon For and Against*, the classic work on historiography, neatly encapsulates the ethereal nature of the historical discourse: nothing is certain, every argument is up for review sooner or later, and no conclusions are totally safe from the next generation of historians. "To expect from history those final conclusions which may perhaps be obtained in other disciplines is in my opinion to misunderstand its nature."<sup>1</sup> Yet, seeking to establish finality and using it to discredit enemies often seems to be precisely the point.

The PiS government came to power in 2015 with a mission. This was to overturn the so-called Third Republic, the political and social order shaped by what it regards as a metropolitan, liberal elite that has foisted a debilitating and politically-correct liberalism onto Poland. In

<sup>1</sup> Peter Geyl, *Napoleon: For and Against* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 15.

its view, a supine attitude towards the European Union; values undermining the rigor of Roman Catholicism, and an inferiority complex regarding the past characterized past Polish governments, especially that of PO and PSL from 2007 to 2015. With the fervor of a revolutionary, it is seeking to overturn the version of Polish history as it evolved since the 1990s. In short, it seeks to return to Poland some dignity and pride in its achievements. Governments have a social policy and an economic policy, and they should also have a historical policy, so runs the argument.<sup>2</sup>

It is the popular press, media, radio, television, and the internet which form the battleground, and “infotainment” is the style. The language is not that of senior boardrooms but that of the street. History still matters in Poland and the conflicts that it engenders are visceral rather than cerebral—a fact overlooked by a Western-trained historian accustomed perhaps to more detachment.<sup>3</sup>

#### POLAND'S VIEW OF ITSELF

It is banal to say that history and geography have shaped Poland, but when it crops up in casual conversation, the impression is used to reinforce an “exceptionalist” view of Poland’s history, which is not readily understandable to outsiders. Like the Russian soul, Polish history is jealously guarded, and in conversation, the point is often comes when the Polish interlocutor will reach for the ace with the phrase, “Ah, but you just don’t understand.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> For a cogent expose of PiS’s historical policies, see the interview with Jarosław Sellin, Vice-Minister of Culture and National Heritage. “J. Sellin o Polityce Historycznej Polski: Mamy Potężne Zadanie do Odrobienia,” *Radio Maryja*, August 21, 2016: <http://www.radiomaryja.pl/informacje/j-sellin-o-polityce-historycznej-polski-potezne-zadanie-odrobienia>. See also See Piotr Litka, “Próba zrzucenia odpowiedzialności za zbrodnie,” *Wprost: Jak Niemcy Zmieniają Historię*, no. 32, August 7, 2016, for the Polish reaction to German historical policy, or in other words, counter-historical policy.

<sup>3</sup> See “Plus Minus, Wojna o Pamięć,” *Rzeczpospolita*, July 18, 2016 for more information on Poland’s historical policy, especially its relations with Ukraine.

<sup>4</sup> Below are some of the classic texts in English that outline the way in which Poland views itself and its past: Norman Davies, *God’s Playground: A History of Poland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Norman Davies, *Europe, A History* (London: Pimlico, 1997); Adam Zamoyski, *The Polish Way* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1997); Neal Ascherson, *The Struggles for Poland* (London: Pan Books in association with Channel



**CONTRA MUNDUM: CHRIST OF NATIONS  
AND NATIONAL FAILURE—A SHORT SECTION ON THE LONG VIEW**

Modern Polish historical consciousness has been shaped by nineteenth-century European Romanticism set against the decline, fall, and occupation of Poland as a state. Poland's foremost romantic poet, Adam Mickiewicz, caught the mood and created a new one, co-opting the Judaic concept of the "chosen people" to attempt to make sense of a string of political and national catastrophes that stemmed from the decay of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the eighteenth century: three partitions by more ruthless and militarily efficient neighbors, a brief attempt at resurrection during the Napoleonic period, and then a further slide into the abyss of seeming permanent Austrification, Prussification, or Russification. Poland, for Mickiewicz, was "*Chrystus Narodów*," the Christ of Nations condemned to suffer for the greater good of Europe. The rest of Europe did not seem to get the message, and despite individual sympathy, existed without Poland. Poland ceased to matter.

Furthermore, at the very moment when the craft or art of history was being shaped by the use of primary sources and the material manifestations of statehood; Polish archives, crown jewels, art, and even language were unavailable for study. Generations of historians saw European history as the rise of a top tier of powers that excluded Poland. Polish historians since have had to shout louder to be heard, in order to make their point. One history of Europe, H.A.L. Fisher's, first published in 1935 and covering the period "from the earliest times to 1713," only mentioned Poland twice, and this was a history covering the time when it was the largest country in Europe.

The reappearance of the Polish state in 1918 saw a brief period of independence extinguished by German and later Soviet occupation. The Second Republic (1918–39) did begin a process of reclaiming Polish history, especially in Warsaw where the urban topography was modified, changed, and re-arranged to extinguish any traces of the centuries-old Russian presence. The manipulation of the city's physical

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Four Television, 1988); Norman Davies, "The Tenacity of Culture," interview by Andrew Kureth, in *Poland Today*, no. 8 (Sept./Nov. 2014): 18–21; Norman Davies, "Poland's Dream of Past Glory," *History Today* 32, no. 11 (November 1982).

space to serve an ideological imperative is perhaps outside the scope of this essay. However, it should be noted that the process was alive throughout the nineteenth century. By 1939, Polish history was again being written by external agents.

### **PATRIOTISM IS ENOUGH**

The loss of state independence coupled with the national resistance to it became the gold standard by which all actions were, and indeed, still are judged (this lies at the heart of the PiS view). There seemed to be too much at stake. The life of the nation rather than the state was threatened with extinction in the nineteenth century, and therefore art, literature, and history should be subordinated to serve the cause of national survival and dignity. Heroes and villains are made by their contributions to patriotic service; any nuance came second. Fryderyk Chopin, for instance, was not just a universally renowned artist but a Polish patriot (despite performing for the Tsar when he was eight years old) who suffered abroad while Poland was crushed during the 1831 rising. Romuald Traugutt, the last commander of the 1863 Rising against the Russians, had been a Tsarist army officer with assimilated German ancestry. In his case, does this mean he should be regarded as a traitor for serving the Tsar or a hero for breaking his oath and considering himself to be a true Pole and, therefore, rebelling against him? The leaders of the Warsaw Uprising in 1944 may have made an insane decision, but they acted out of patriotic motives and, thus, are honored by having streets and public spaces named after them. Polish culture like Scottish, was one based on defeat and the national romance that went with it.

### **THE LEGACY OF PRL: THE SEARCH FOR CERTITUDE**

It is not only the romantic imperative that shapes Polish historiography; also important is the medium-term historical impact of the Peoples' Republic of Poland (*Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa*, PRL). The official ideology required the correct historical policy, and the

Soviet Union became the eternal ally and Germany the eternal enemy. The AK (Home Army) also became enemies, and the “Accursed Soldiers” (see below)—including individual heroes like Captain Pilecki<sup>5</sup> or General Fieldorf—were destined to become heroes in time. Massacres against the Polish nation like the one in Katyn forest were ascribed to the Germans well into the 1970s (even in the West), and had the basic factual elements were manipulated. Those massacres perpetrated by Poles themselves like Jedwabne and Kielce (see below) were taboo.<sup>6</sup>

A micro case may serve as an good example of these dynamics. Dotted around Warsaw are commemorative plaques (160 in all) marking the places where street executions took place in late 1943–44; these were put up during the late 1940s and 1950s. On them are inscribed the number of victims together with the date; they were killed by “Hitlerites” and all of them died for Polish freedom. Well did they? How do we know this? Perhaps they were just unlucky for having been caught up in one of the many street dragnets. Perhaps they wanted to live rather than die? We do not know, but the government of the time ascribed their deaths to some more elevated reason than may have been the case.

### THE TRANSFORMATION: PANDORA'S BOX

The fall of communism was not just an event that enabled Polish themes to be debated openly; it became a theme in itself. The usual actions took (and are taking place) place in the public space: changing street names, dismantling or moving statues. The planned decommunization legislation is busy with these adjustments, changing the *Trasa*

<sup>5</sup> Captain Witold Pilecki, a remarkable officer who contrived to get himself arrested and sent to Auschwitz in 1940. He reported on the conditions and started an intelligence network there. He later fought in the Warsaw Uprising and was imprisoned and executed by the communists in 1948. He is the patron of many schools and organizations and has become the *beau ideal* in the PiS pantheon. General Emil Fieldorf earned recognition as the head of the Home Army's special forces during the occupation, and he became deputy C-in-C of the Home Army after 1944. He was executed in 1953.

<sup>6</sup> See Artur Becker, “Bardzo Zła Zmiana, *Rzeczpospolita*, April 7, 2016 for more on the poisonous legacy of PRL historical policy.

*Armii Ludowej*, which commemorated the Communist People's Army of the Second World War, to one named after the late president Lech Kaczyński.

In the intellectual space, new faces were added to the pantheon. But like the economic sphere, there was no Western man, fully formed and waiting to break free to fill the space communism had supposedly vacated. Rather it was "homo-post-Sovieticus" in all his complexity, and with all his complexes.

The transformation and the Solidarity phenomenon caused as many problems as they solved. The narrative surrounding events concerning the trade union and its leaders, which was indelibly fixed in the imagination as a popular bottom-up workers movement led by a charismatic Lech Wałęsa, is being effectively challenged (see section below). How has PiS changed the legend and reality of Wałęsa? Wałęsa is being downgraded, while the late President Lech Kaczyński, who according to liberal orthodoxy was a very minor player in the Solidarity drama, is replacing him at the helm.

More than their predecessors in PO, the personnel of the PiS government is encouraging a particularly muscular kind of Polish patriotism, one that draws on the strengths of the romantic tradition: its stress on the individual military brilliance of heroes against the background of national catastrophe; the identification of national identity with Roman Catholicism; an oversensitivity to criticism, especially from abroad. Thus, the term "Polish concentration camp," which may be understood as a lazy *lapsus lingua* by those that use it, is now likely to be punishable even abroad. The Polish Anti-Defamation League has even sued the German ZTV over its portrayal of the AK in the television series *Our Mothers, Our Fathers*. In one of the episodes, the AK was portrayed as an anti-Semitic, Jew-killing organization. Presumably, as soon as Polish television screens a wartime series with a cartoonish sadistic German, we can expect the lawsuits to fly from the other side.

Things only start to make sense if we regard themes in Polish history as battlegrounds between the right and left, conservative and liberal, Sarmatian and Western. Below, we examine some of the current themes shaping the field.

## THE ACCURSED SOLDIERS: THE NEW COOL

If there is one example that would encapsulate the party's view and use of modern Polish history, it would probably be that of the Accursed Soldiers, the new cool and indeed cult. This is one of the best examples of the breakdown of what Norman Davies called the "western historical triumphalist" school of history.<sup>7</sup>

Western perceptions of the Second World War generally stop at the peace conferences of Yalta and Potsdam where the lines of the new Europe were drawn. Britain, France, and the US could contain the USSR in Europe and concentrate on colonial expansion or retreat. The periodization is neat: 1939–45. On the ground in Poland, the dust was far from settled in 1945, and the conflict looked very different from their perspective.<sup>8</sup> The war and occupation was not the simple affair that is often portrayed in the West. The clash of titans in Eastern Europe played against a background of local animosities between political factions and ethnic groups. This was a three- or four-sided war.

Each political grouping that reflected the prewar Polish political spectrum had its own armed wing. The communists had the *Gwardia Ludowa* (People's Guard); the Peasant's Party's was the BCh (Peasants' Battalions); the right-wing camp, the ONR (National Radical Camp), had their own armed force: the NSZ (National Armed Forces). The broad-based national grouping with its allegiance to the London government-in-exile was the AK. The AK was effectively destroyed in the Warsaw Uprising and was either dissolved in January 1945 or merged with the NSZ and other groups. The NSZ made the operationally correct decision (from its perspective) neither to join the Uprising in a major way, nor dissolve, and instead maintained its forces.<sup>9</sup>

For Poland, the war had not ended, and although new borders had been redrawn, they were regarded as temporary. A war fever swept the country as Poland expected the Western powers and the USSR to

<sup>7</sup> Davies, *Europe: A History*, 19.

<sup>8</sup> Marcin Zaremba, *Wielka Trwoga. Polska 1944–1947* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo. Znak, 2012). A classic analysis of the demoralization of Polish society after hostilities "ended," which sets the context for much of the debate on post-1945 Polish history.

<sup>9</sup> Rafał Wnuk, "Brygada Świętokrzyska. Zakłamana legenda," *Wyborcza.pl, Ale Historia* supplement, January 25, 2016. An article on the complexities of resistance to two equally savage enemies, Germany and Russia.

fight with each other. The NSZ acted on this belief, and it made sense to wait for the new war to emerge with its forces intact. This was a reasonable assumption, but it underestimated the permanency of the Yalta and Potsdam conferences. Thus, the NSZ units raided local party institutions and functionaries, especially in the south of the country. The communist authorities mounted counterinsurgency operations of varying scales. It was a war characterized by great brutality on both sides, with civilians caught in the middle as usual, and it lasted until the 1950s, when it became obvious that Poland's situation was not temporary.

Condemned as bandits, fascists, or reactionaries, the study of the subject only became possible in the late 1990s. The name "Accursed Soldiers" (*żołnierze wyklęci*) was taken from a book by Jerzy Ślaski, and the name stuck and is now worn and exhibited as a badge of honor. The late President Lech Kaczyński (PiS) propagated the cult, and in 2011, Accursed Soldiers were awarded their own day of commemoration by President Bronisław Komorowski (PO).

The idea and reality of these soldiers as die-hard patriots fighting on when perhaps reason would have dictated another course resonates with the romantic tradition as expressed in pop and youth culture. T-shirts and fashion accessories are very visible on Warsaw's streets, worn by teenagers and twenty-somethings who are the same age as the Accursed Soldiers themselves, and thus exhibit a high degree of association.<sup>10</sup>

The Accursed Soldiers still cause controversy. On the liberal left, they are associated with the far right and especially the pre-war ONR organization, a fascist and anti-Semitic body banned in the 1930s and revived in the 1990s. Their demonstration in Białystok in April 2016 sent a shiver through the liberal media. The debate opened up the old conflict over the nature of the war and the methods used, specifically the killing of innocent civilians caught up in the fighting. On the one hand, they were officially rehabilitated on August 15, 2016 in the ceremony to commemorate the Battle of Warsaw in 1920, during which

<sup>10</sup> *Newsweek*, Czas Patriotów, O co walczą Polskę walczać?, Małgorzata Świąchowicz/Ewelina Lis, nr 33 8.8.2016, patriotic clothing. *Polityka*, Co w sercu to na piersi, Joanna Cieśla, nr 33, patriotic clothing.

President Duda added their plaque to the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior in Warsaw. Iconic figures of the movement Zygmunt Szendzielarz “Łupaszko,” Danuta Śiędzikówna “Inka,” and Feliks Selmano-wicz “Zagończyk” have been rehabilitated, and their remains have been buried with full military honors.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, the right has vilified Professor Zygmunt Baumann, a world-famous sociologist who fought against the anticommunist resistance as a zealous Polish People’s Army officer. It must be said that Baumann never regretted his involvement, and his explanations of his youthful adherence to the communist cause and action are somewhat awkward, to say the least.

The Accursed Soldiers have also stepped into the mainstream with the recent feature film *Historia Roya* (The History of Roy), which told the story of just one of a number of such recalcitrants. The film was successful with 300,000 viewers. However, the Minister of Culture and National Heritage, Piotr Gliński, expressed his worrying reaction when the film was not admitted to the Gdynia Film Festival. Apparently, artistic merit was not enough, and he issued a statement about consequences. His ministry is very active in promoting a version of Polish history, and in 2016 he announced a competition for a Hollywood-style blockbuster film script about an aspect of Polish history. Here is the crux of the matter: Poland has to compete. Other countries, especially Germany and Russia (not to mention the United States), have their own historical policy, which is often expressed through film, and they can reach out to the world using this medium. Poland is being left behind and has to catch up, because if it does not, then in a few years’ time, Germany will have been invaded by Poland in 1939, Poland was responsible for the Holocaust, and Russia was a democratic anti-fascist power.

During his eulogy at the funerals of “Inka” and “Zagończyk,” President Duda said that Poland had recovered its dignity after twenty-

<sup>11</sup> To get the full flavor of the emotions generated by the Accursed Soldiers, see the following downloads from the funerals of Inka and ZagonczykZ: “Okrzyki do L.Wałęsy: Bolek! Judasz! po mszy pogrzebowej ‘Inki’ i ‘Zagończyka’ – 28.08.16,” YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CDLkpXkZixQ>; President Wałęsa jeering: “Prowokacja KOD-u na uroczystościach pogrzebowych ‘INKI’ i ‘ZAGOŃCZYKA’ – Gdańsk 28.08.16,” YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7pE7PKtc2f4>- KOD/; Mateusz Kijowski jostled, “Minister Macierewicz’s speech,” Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=afkMiIbo>; and “President Duda’s speech,” Youtube: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q9NhNx2\\_tls](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q9NhNx2_tls).

seven years, and lumped their executioners together with the post-1989 settlement. In 2013, General Jaruzelski, the architect of martial law in Poland who regarded by many as nothing but a Russian placeholder, was also given a state funeral by the PO government. No doubt, in honoring the Accursed Soldiers, many feel that redress is being made at last. However, scuffles allegedly broke out between the ONR and KOD activists, with the former questioning the latter's rights to be present at the funeral. The search for patriots and villains is a complex and fascinating subject neglected and worthy of study in its own right.

### POPULAR HISTORY, POPULAR FRONT

We can say that Poland is certainly not a "post-historical" country, judging by the number and quality of historical publications on offer from the popular press, and a visit to newsstands presents a fascinating array from which to choose. The major newspapers, the conservative *Rzeczpospolita* and the liberal *Gazeta Wyborcza*, each have their weekly historical section, *Rzecz o Historii* and *Ale Historia* respectively. The liberal weeklies *Newsweek* and *Polityka* also have separate magazines as well. What is interesting is that the conservative magazines have taken the lead, and the publications that are the most visible on the shelves are *Do Rzeczy Historia*, *wSieci Historii*, and *Uważam Rze Historia*. Reasons for such a plethora put forward by some observers is the failure of schools to properly teach the Polish historical narrative, and the abnegation of the liberal elites (and the parties they represent) to present their narrative to society. Historical curiosity is present; the question is, where it will lead? It is certainly guided more by the right.<sup>12</sup>

These publications are not superficial simplifications; they are popularizing difficult, hidden, or neglected themes in Polish history. They blend well-written and lively articles with commentaries by

<sup>12</sup> See for example the following issues of the *Historia Do Rzeczy* supplement: "Polskie Termopile: Wizna 39," *Historia Do Rzeczy*, no. 9 (September 2016); "Lato 1941: Masakra na Kresach," *Historia Do Rzeczy*, no. 7 (July 2016); "Chaim Rumkowski: Dyktator getta," *Historia Do Rzeczy*, no. 6 (June 2016); "Cenckiewicz ujawnia ofiary 'Bolka,'" *Historia Do Rzeczy*, no. 5 (May 2016). For a review of the graphic style see [www.google.pl](http://www.google.pl) and search *historia+dorzeczy+okładki*.



current conservative thinkers and journalists.<sup>13</sup> To appeal to a younger audience, there are comic strips, and *Do Rzeczy* in particular uses comic-style illustrated covers, often featuring lurid images of German or Russian killers spattered with Polish blood, or controversial interpretations such as one showing General Franco as the hero of anti-communism or Jan Sobieski as the savior of Europe against militant Islam. Subjects (studied between April and June 2016) range from the great Polish victories of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to the Second World War and the PRL.

The cover of the July 2016 issue deals with the massacre of the Polish population of the Kresy (the eastern borderlands) by Soviet forces retreating from the Germans in 1941. June's cover featured a report on Chaim Rumkowski, the often-maligned leader of the Łódź ghetto, and examined the nuances of life under the German occupation. Rumkowski is a controversial figure since he is often accused of collaboration with the German authorities in Łódź. However, he nearly managed to pull off the impossible: saving Jewish lives. The Łódź Ghetto was liquidated in the summer of 1944, six months shy of the city's liberation by the Soviets. Rumkowski and the Łódź ghetto lasted over a year longer than his compatriots in Warsaw and elsewhere. So, is he a hero or villain?

When does collaboration become active collusion? May's issue carried a series of articles by Prof. Sławomir Cenckiewicz on the case against "Bolek" (see below). September's issue dealt with the "Polish Thermopylae" of 1939, a doomed last stand during the campaign, and one that ticks all the romantic boxes.

On the whole, the tone is masculine: battles, wars, derring-do espionage, and commando stuff, the military—a robust affirmation of mainly Polish history. And it is mainly Polish history that is being treated. But this does not mean that these stories are lightweight. *DoRzeczyHistoria* wants to get Polish schools to subscribe to the magazine. Also, all these types of magazines carry advertising for mail order patriotic clothing t-shirts and accessories.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Sławomir Zajączkowski, "Sławomir Zajączkowski: Czekają nas boom na komiks historyczny," interviewed by Łukasz Chmielewski, *www.alejakomiksu.com*, May 9, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Aleksandra Niemojewska, "Boom Na Historię," *www.uwazamrze.pl*, August 25, 2016.

The publications serve to assure the young that there is a Polish history beyond the one taught to their parents, who were spoon fed the communist version of Polish history and were encouraged not to question the official categorization of villains and heroes. How open will this version be? Time will tell if we are seeing one official version of history replaced by another.

Why no left-wing history? The Left has abdicated its historical role in favor of social issues, but it is also associated with communism. It may not be easy to write a history of the Polish workers movement because, ultimately, we see the Gulag and PRL. But we are a long way from that, just as investigating Polish anti-Semitism in the 1930s is a long way from Jedwabne and allegations of participation in the Holocaust.<sup>15</sup>

#### PATRIOTIC CLOTHING: IF YOU'VE GOT IT, FLAUNT IT

This is a recent phenomenon, particularly on Warsaw's streets, where it is possible to see teenagers and young people wearing T-shirts printed with the brassard and anchor symbols of the AK, the Accursed Soldiers, the *husaria* (the heavy cavalry of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries), and the 303 Squadron (the famous Polish RAF squadron in the Battle of Britain). Even the arcane is represented: the coat of arms of the Republic of Three Nations—Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine, which was the ideal for which the rebels of the 1831 Uprising fought. More ominous is the rallying cry “Śmierć Wrogom Narodu!” (Death to the enemies of the nation).<sup>16</sup>

August in Poland sees two major anniversaries: the Warsaw Uprising and the 1920 Battle of Warsaw. On both occasions, such clothing is highly visible, a uniting force, as one supporter put it, rather than a divisive one, as the liberal magazines *Polityka* and *Newsweek* would have it. The latter argue that because the Polish youth is deprived of adequate role models and the symbolism of a new Poland beguiled by the mate-

<sup>15</sup> On why there is no left-wing history see, Radio interview with Prof. Adam Leszczynski PAN, *Światopogląd*, July 26, 2016.

<sup>16</sup> To see a selection of patriotic t-shirts and accessories visit the following websites: [www.surgepolonia.pl](http://www.surgepolonia.pl); [www.redisbad.pl](http://www.redisbad.pl).

rialism that membership of EU seemed to promise, instead have turned to atavistic symbols of a much more militant (others would say self-confident) Poland. A Polish teenager can rightfully feel both proud and part of a lineage of military prowess stretching back to the medieval period.<sup>17</sup> Of course, his or her choice of T-shirt is selective and cannot reflect the nuances of Polish history in a single image or slogan (which misses the point of wearing one). The debate is about drawing the line between healthy pride and ugly nationalism.<sup>18</sup>

Symbolism and dress are important and have been historically. It can be argued that this stretches back to the eighteenth century when Polish Sarmatian noblemen proudly displayed their eastern kafbans and punk hairstyles and, thus, their allegiance to the stubborn, proud, conservative, and eastward-looking strain of Polish consciousness. Progressives took their cue from France and wore wigs and frock coats. In an age when conservatives and liberals wear the same brand of sneakers and have the same smart phones, this difference in symbolism is significant.

#### POP-CULTURIZATION: BRANDING HISTORY

Every war becomes a war film eventually. The “pop-culturization” of Polish history is no recent phenomenon. Maybe we should not be too harsh, since this is happening everywhere, especially if we review the pop-cultural aspects of American or British cinema or television, namely the view of the Second World War not as a close-run slug-ging match redeemed by alliances as cynical as those of our enemies, but as a series of heroic, herculean commando raids.

Polish history has undergone such a process too.<sup>19</sup> As with those of the West, the Polish versions are enjoyable, but must be taken with the same grain of salt. *Kolombowie* (a saga set during the Warsaw

<sup>17</sup> On nostalgia for the war see, Adam Szostkiewicz, “Duch wojny krąży nad Europą: Czekanie na wojnę,” *Polityka*, no. 27, June 29, 2016.

<sup>18</sup> See television report on misuse of the PW anchor symbol, *TVN Warszawa*, August 24, 2016. Regarding ‘s, see Z Antonim Ferencym “Odzyskać Polskę Walczącą,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, August 2, 2016.

<sup>19</sup> For example, see Dr. Marcin Zaremba, interviewed by Paweł Sulik, *Post Factum*, TOK FM, August 1, 2016.

Uprising charting the doom of the AK and its young fighters, the generation born after independence in 1918); *Czterej Pancerni i Pies* (a television series following the fortunes of a Polish T34 tank crew and their pet dog); *Stawka Większa niż Życie* (a Polish secret agent in the Wehrmacht working for Soviet intelligence); and currently *Miasto '44* (a war film about the Warsaw Rising) and *Czas Honoru* (a popular television series about secret agents who parachuted into occupied Poland), are all hugely entertaining, popular, and beguiling. Therein, lies their strength.

Companies are getting in on the action too. Bank PKO BP sponsored a huge billboard based on patriotic themes on Warsaw's main Rondo Dmowskiego at the prime location of the junction of Aleja Jerozolimskie and Ulica Marszałkowska. PGiNG, the state energy producer, sponsored a commemorative walk to mark Józef Piłsudski's legions of 1914, pictures of which took up the inside cover of *Historia Do Rzeczy* with the tag-line "We warm Polish hearts!" One company even proposed an "Accursed Soldiers" energy drink aimed at the youth market, i.e., the very same young people who wear the T-shirts. Patriotism sells, especially in 2016.<sup>20</sup>

#### JAN T. GROSS: COUNTING THE BODIES IN JEDWABNE

He is the *bête noire* of current Polish historiography. The great controversialist, he is either responsible for illuminating the darkest corners of Polish behavior during the German occupation or poisoning Polish self-image (a *nestbeschmutzer*), depending on your view.<sup>21</sup>

Arguably his most famous work is *Neighbors*, a controversial account of Polish inhabitants' massacre of their Jewish co-residents in the village of Jedwabne in eastern Poland in 1941, during the period between the retreat of Soviet occupation forces and the German es-

<sup>20</sup> On the commercialization of Accursed Soldiers "brand," see Marek Bartosiński, "Energia 'żołnierzy wyklętych' w puszcze," interviewed by Aleksander Gurgul, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, July 16, 2016.

<sup>21</sup> For a critical overview of J.T. Gross, see Dr. Karolina Wigura, interview by Instytut Socjologii University of Warsaw Radio, *TOK FM*. A rare voice of moderation in the debate about the culture of remembrance can be found at the following link. <http://audycje.tokfm.pl/audycja/Prawda-Nas-Zaboli/87>

establishment of their authority in the region.<sup>22</sup> This and subsequent works like *Fear* and *Golden Harvest* subverted, above all, the romantic notion of Poland as a heroic nation. And indeed, he has set out to confirm the notion of the Poles as inveterate and murderous anti-Semites. He has attracted much academic and general criticism and presses all the right buttons when it comes to puncturing Polish *amour-propre*.

President Aleksander Kwasniewski made a public apology to the victims in July 2001, which enraged patriotic (conservative, PiS supporting) sentiment further. Poles simply did not behave that way, look at Yad Vashem and the Righteous of Nations!; look at the Ulma family or Irena Sendler!<sup>23</sup> This type of response culminated in the absurd in July 2016, when the Minister of Education, Anna Zalewska, when pressed during an interview about Jedwabne, could not bring herself to say that Poles had ultimately committed the atrocity, but instead cited “anti-Semites,” and added that there were “historical complications” to the issue. The new director of the IPN, Jarosław Szarek, squarely blamed the Germans for the massacre during his televised interview for the job.<sup>24</sup>

Gross’s critics cite the numbers involved and the unreliability of the witnesses. The critics though, have a point. Gross has a cavalier attitude to body counts (see below) and the debate frequently centers on whether there were 300–400 victims as the IPN investigators calculated or the much larger 1200–1400 victims as Gross maintains. Was it the Poles with German supervision, or the Germans with Polish assistance? The debate always seems to get stuck on the numbers.

The wider context is left unexplained. The pressures on Polish society applied by the Germans that led to the opening of age-old and recent fissures are rarely understood. The universal lesson that Jedwabne could teach us, namely just how thin “civilization” is and how

<sup>22</sup> Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>23</sup> The Ulma family of Markowa village near Rzeszów was executed by the Germans in 1944 as a reprisal for sheltering their Jewish neighbours. Irena Sendler was a member of the Jewish Support group Żegota in occupied Warsaw and has been credited with saving over 2500 Jewish children from certain death in the Warsaw Ghetto.

<sup>24</sup> Minister Zaleska on Jedwabne and Kielce. Anna Zalewska, interviewed by Monika Olejnik, *Kropka nad I*, TVN, July 12, 2016.

possible it is to release our inner demons, given the perfect storm of circumstances, whether too much authority or the absence of it. Jedwabne has become a totem. Poles could not even unify to applaud *Ida* the Oscar-winning film by Paweł Pawlikowski. Even though the issue dealt with the massacre of Jewish inhabitants in an eastern village by their Polish neighbors and was balanced by a Pole-hating Jewish judge as one of the main characters, the film was seen as anti-Polish. The nuances were forgotten and one dominant line of dispute emerged: the Poles as anti-Semites. Critics dubbed the film “*Gn-Ida*,” or rotten. The same reaction, or over-reaction, met the earlier *Po-łtosie*, which dealt with a similar subject. The lead actor, Maciej Stuhr was on the receiving end of an avalanche of internet hate. For the moment, a large part of the Polish response to the events of the war is a response to Gross himself.<sup>25</sup>

In June 2017, Adam Bodnar, the Commissioner for Human Rights (nominated to the job by Civic Platform, the leftist grouping in parliament), landed himself in hot water with the government and its supporters when commenting on Prime Minister Szydło’s speech at Auschwitz. On June 14, 2017, she raised a furore in liberal circles. Essentially her words advanced the idea that genocide emerges when a government cannot protect the security of its own, and was interpreted as an attack on the immigration policy of the West and a justification for PiS’s anti-immigration stance. These comments were met with scandal and shock from the liberal media as well as tweets from Donald Tusk. Bodnar’s response was to remind us that some Poles took an active part in the Holocaust. Shock and scandal then emerged from the right. Bodnar felt pressured to issue a public apology and clarification. Scandal and shock all round then. The first casualty of Poland’s culture wars is its thin skin.

<sup>25</sup> Jan T. Gross, “Oni Zlikwidowali Rzeczywistość,” interviewed by Aleksandra Pawlicka, *Newsweek Polska*, July 11, 2016.

## MUSEUM OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR: GIVING WAR A CHANCE

The accepted narrative about the Second World War still hangs over our thinking. Its awkward nuances are buried under warm and safe notions of the “last good war.” Conservative Poland still operates on the basis of the narrative that it was the first country to resist Hitler, the nation that saved many of its Jewish citizens, and the nation that suffered the most. Amos Oz’s quip that Jews and Poles compete with each other over who suffered the most is apt: two chosen nations, but citizens of one republic; a family dispute over who took the most punishment. Poland’s place in the global conflict waxed and waned in importance, and ultimately it was the global context that mattered despite the blood, sweat, and tears. China, the US, and Japan in Asia and the clash between Germany and Russia in Europe (still unresolved) and the role of the US; these were the main theaters and themes of the war, and they are difficult to swallow. In this case Britain has an analogous narrative to Poland—an overestimation of its ultimate importance or, at least, the story of fading relevance from 1940–45.

The establishment of the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk, which opened in March 2017, has set the scene for friction between the global picture and the Polish experience in terms of getting the balance between the two right and placing the correct emphasis.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the Minister of Culture Piotr Gliński had commissioned three reports from eminent pro-government historians and journalists charged with investigating the balance. Their findings were published, and although details given, especially to the press, were slim, the main thrust of their argument was that there was too much concentration on the pathos of war, the suffering of civilians, and not enough on the virtues that wartime calls forth and even demands: heroism, self-sacrifice, patriotism; in other words, not enough Poland. Dr. Piotr Niwiński summed up the evaluation with the statement, “war hardens.”<sup>27</sup>

Professors Timothy Snyder and Norman Davies, both on the board of the museum at the time, protested the manipulation by the govern-

<sup>26</sup> Jacek Tomczuk, “Chichot Historii,” *Newsweek Polska*, May 9, 2016.

<sup>27</sup> Krzysztof Katka, “Odtajnione recenzje Muzeum II Wojny. Zgodnie z zamówieniem PiS są miażdżące. Bo wojna ma ‘hartować człowieka,’” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, July 12, 2016.

ment. Davies resigned citing that the affair smacked of “Bolshevism.” Snyder wrote up his protest in *The New York Review of Books*.

The museum is to be merged with the not-yet-built museum for the Battle of Westerplatte. The latter commemorates the German battle to take a Polish army supply station near Gdańsk harbor, which began on September 1, 1939 and lasted seven days. The stand was indeed a heroic one with the small garrison facing heavy naval gunfire at point blank range. They surrendered after all hope of relief evaporated. The general narrative is that Westerplatte is where the first shots of the Second World War were fired (rather than Spain or China) and is the site where commemorations are held at dawn each September 1. Here is Poland at the center of world events!

The move to merge the two may be seen as an attempt by the patriotic heroic supporters to muscle in on their liberal “pity of war” colleagues. A museum to the prosaic fact that the war was something that most people tried to get through as best they could and that only a minority was villainous or heroic may not attract many Poles.<sup>28</sup> However, Poles may be forced to acknowledge the fact that the British at Kohima or the Americans in the Pacific (or the Japanese for that matter) fought just as bravely as the Poles at Monte Cassino; that the fate of Russian POWs in German hands was every bit as difficult as Poles in Soviet camps; that Warsaw shared the fate of Nanking and was not unique; and that the Polish experience and the universal experience of the war are one and the same. The auction looks set to begin.

The dichotomy could be a false one, since not even liberal historians or publications doubt the heroism of those Poles who displayed it. All Poles are patriotic but the critic is dubbed as un-patriotic.

Since the opening of the museum, tempers have cooled somewhat, helped by the appointment of a new museum director. Perhaps attendance numbers will be the final arbiter. According to Polish media sources, over 150,000 have visited since the opening. In late 2017, the new board made alterations in emphasis by adding a film on Poland’s experience made by the IPN.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, it may be worth pointing out that it is not just conservatives who are prone to the demands of a

<sup>28</sup> Ryszarda Socha “Muzeum Wojny i Wojna Muzeów,” *Polityka*, no. 18 (April 27, 2016).

<sup>29</sup> Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M7MSG4Q-4as>



historical policy in their museums; liberals also face these demands. Polish criticisms of the European Union's museum, the House of European History, may be justified on this point.<sup>30</sup>

### WOŁYŃ: TIT FOR TAT

In an example of what has been termed “conservative post-modernism”—relativizing truth—PiS historians have tackled the Wołyń massacres of July 1943. In this case, it is argued that while Poles could not possibly have committed a massacre such as Jedwabne because they were neighbours, *Ukrainian* neighbours committed violence that was much worse.

The event is little known.<sup>31</sup> Set against a background of increasing Polish and Ukrainian tensions since the 1930s, matters came to a bloody head when the militants of the UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army), the military wing of the OUN (Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists) headed by Stepan Bandera, were ordered to wipe out the Polish presence in Wołyń (Volhynia) Province, while the German occupiers observed. This was the ethnically mixed region of eastern Poland occupied first by the Soviets and then by the Germans. By 1943, the OUN ordered a policy of extermination, sensing that it was necessary to cleanse all the territory of a future Ukraine of its former enemies. Over 100,000 Poles died, as well as Ukrainians, Czechs, and Jews. For the OUN, the main showdown was the fight for Ukrainian statehood against the encroaching Red Army; consequently, they needed to purge the future, ethnically pure Ukraine of all undesirables. The chief weapons were the axe or knife and the intent to use it often against neighbors. Polish reprisals claimed over 20,000 Ukrai-

<sup>30</sup> See “Jak Mamy Myśleć o Dziejach Europy,” *Rzeczpospolita Plus Minus*, no. 40 (October 7–8, 2017).

<sup>31</sup> Grzegorz Moryka, *Od rzezi wołyńskiej do Akcji “Wiśła”: konflikt polsko-ukraiński 1943–1947* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2011); Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (London: Vintage, 2011); Władysław and Ewa Siemaszko, *Ludobójstwo dokonane przez nacjonalistów ukraińskich na ludności polskiej Wołynia 1939–1945*, Vols. 1 and 2 (Warszawa: Wydawn. von borowiecky 2000); and Wawrzyniec Konarski, “Wołyń—przemilczane ludobójstwo,” interviewed by Robert Walenciak, *Przegląd*, July 4, 2016.

nian lives. In a bloody war, this action reached Breughellesque levels of horror.

The PiS government has a point in calling this a genocide, going a level higher than the earlier IPN definition of “ethnic cleansing with the characteristics of genocide.” The Sejm almost unanimously ratified a declaration condemning the action as “genocide” and declared that July 11 was to be the commemoration of the victims of the massacre.<sup>32</sup> The thrust is to make Ukrainians admit this and somehow make them disavow Bandera as their iconic leader. This directly subverts the Ukrainian creation myth places Bandera at the center (indeed, earlier Ukrainian authorities had renamed the Moscow Prospect in Kiev after Bandera). The Ukrainian IPN has other priorities, namely stressing that the OUN and UPA fought primarily against the Soviets. The Wołyń and eastern Galician massacres were, in effect, a secondary theater of operations for the Ukrainians, albeit a very bloody one. They are certainly reluctant to bow to Polish pressure and admit genocide. The Polish side shows no sign of compromise either. A couple of days after the Polish vote, a Ukrainian MP put forward a motion in the Ukrainian parliament condemning Polish genocide against Ukrainians in the 1930s.<sup>33</sup> It seems that this controversy is the reverse of the Jedwabne debate. The Ukrainians are the ones unable to come to terms with their role as perpetrators in Wołyń similar to the Poles in Jedwabne and Kielce.<sup>34</sup>

President Poroschenko expressed his regret at the decision to commemorate the event, despite paying homage to the slaughtered when he was in Warsaw for the 2016 NATO summit. Defense Minister Macierewicz further inflamed the situation a few days later when he implicated Russia as the instigator of the atrocities behind the scenes.<sup>35</sup> The spat is still simmering. In November 2017, Foreign Minister Wi-

<sup>32</sup> On the IPN and Ukraine, see Marek Kozubal, “Wołk pod lupą śledczych,” *Rzeczpospolita*, August 5, 2016. , see Andrzej Szeptycki, “Prawo do sądów i ocen,” *Rzeczpospolita*, August 2, 2016.

<sup>33</sup> , see Andrzej Szeptycki, “Dlaczego Polski Narodowiec nie lubi Ukraińców,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, July 11, 2016.

<sup>34</sup> See Łukasz Jasina, “Polskie ‘Bękarty Wojny,’” *Rzeczpospolita —Plus Minus*, October 1, 2016.

<sup>35</sup> Piotr Andrusieczko, “Ukraińcy o polskim ludobójstwie,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, August 5, 2016. For the report see “Kaczyński: Na Wołyniu było ludobójstwo,” *Rzeczpospolita*, July 12, 2016.

told Waszczykowski stated that he wished to bar any Ukrainian with overt anti-Polish convictions from entering the country. The director of the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance, Wołodymyr Wiatrowycz, countered by describing the newly-mounted plaque commemorating the Wołyn massacres on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Warsaw as one which memorializes “chekists.”<sup>36</sup>

**BOLEK AND THE IPN: WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE HEROES OR  
*QUIS CUSTODIET IPSOS CUSTODIES?***

Who should be the custodian of national memory: individuals, historians with their jealousies and disputes, or state or quasi-state institutions?

In 1998, the Polish state formed the Instytut Pamięci Narodowej (Institute of National Remembrance, IPN) to be the repository of the national conscience and its sensitive archives. The Institute is a curious mix between an academic research body and court. According to statute, it is tasked with: preserving the memory of the victims, losses, and damage suffered by the Polish nation during World War Two and its aftermath (meaning 1939–89); preserving the patriotic traditions of the Polish nation’s struggles with its occupiers, both Nazi and communist; prosecuting crimes against peace and war crimes; and fighting to compensate all those oppressed by the state, which violated human rights. It has its branches nationwide, hosts international conferences, and co-operates with a range of international research institutions.

A walk round the bookshop in its education center on Warsaw’s Marszałkowska Street reveals the wealth of its publishing efforts. There are heavyweight volumes deal with recent Polish history, analyses of regional resistance movements during the war and beyond, as well as comic books about heroes of the resistance for all ages, and board games about, for example, 303 Squadron (see above). Pop culture competes with or complements serious history.

<sup>36</sup> <https://tvnwarszawa.tvn24.pl/informacje,news,nowe-tablice-na-grobie-niezanego-zolnierza-upamietniaja-czekistow,245843.html>.

The IPN runs a full monthly educational program. June 2017 included a concert to commemorate the children of Warsaw during the Uprising of 1944, film recordings of PRL cuisine, an international conference on the Polish vision of and evaluations of communism post-1939, a lecture in a debate series entitled “Between Swastika and Red Star” on the subject of the Augustów operation in July 1945, a meeting on the hidden mass graves in Łączki, a documentary film on the Accursed Soldiers (see section above), and a film on the Radom demonstrations in June 1976.<sup>37</sup>

### WHAT IS ALL THIS FOR?

Why does this institution, which, on the face of it, performs a vital educational function in revealing hidden and shameful truths about the PRL, attract so much opprobrium from the liberal opposition? In October 2016, Grzegorz Schetyna, the leader of Civic Platform, called for its liquidation together with that of the CBA, the *Centralny Biuro Antykorupcyjny* (Central Anti-corruption Bureau) as part of a pre-manifesto declaration given at his party conference. Thus, he lumped the main anti-corruption agency, the Polish version of the FBI, together with an academic institution. One of the arguments about dismantling the CBA is that it is a “super” police force that will strike fear in and paralyze the governing party’s political opponents. By lumping the two together, Schetyna seemed to be equating the two bodies.<sup>38</sup>

Joanna Mucha, a leading PO MP said that the CBA is no longer “reformable” (despite being established by PO). She heaped on the bile: “And that history as presented by the IPN was ‘falsified and mis-

<sup>37</sup> The “Augustów Sweep” occurred in the northeast region of Poland and was a joint Soviet-Polish Communist counterinsurgency operation against the anticommunist Home Army. Łączki refers to an area in the Powązki military cemetery in Warsaw where the bodies of victims who had been executed by the Communist authorities in the 1940s and 1950s were secretly buried. Archaeologists, including those from the IPN, are excavating the site. The industrial city of Radom was the scene of violent anti-government protests, which were bloodily quelled.

<sup>38</sup> <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/po-chce-zlikwidowac-cba-i-ipn-szef-instytutu-pamieci-narodowej-odpowiada-na-atak-grzegorza-schetyny-6043645156742273a>.

represented . . . What's happening with Lech Wałęsa, what's happening with research into so-called 'new' history, is unacceptable." Tellingly though, she added, "This is not to say that the country does not need some sort of policy of remembrance." Schetyna stated, the "manipulation of facts cannot serve historical research, neither can the unworthy exploitation of history and the ruling party's promotion of its own ideology. We cannot allow their destruction of heroes and legends." We are back to heroes and legends again.

The IPN's current director, Dr. Jarosław Szarek, riposted that Schetyna did not actually give any examples of such manipulation. After citing the educational work of the Institute, He added the the IPN is not connected with any party and that it wishes only to relate history to the next generation. "Today, the young generation demands true history, and we can't see this, for example, in the liquidation of history lessons in schools. No one has dictated the sympathies of the young, it's their need."

The example of a re-orientation in interpretation occurred when the present director was appointed. During a preliminary interview in a Sejm (Parliament) committee, he was asked who killed the Jewish inhabitants of Jedwabne (see section above). Adroitly, he replied the Germans, attributing overall responsibility for the atrocity to the occupying powers. The Polish inhabitants of Jedwabne were not to blame; someone else did it. Critics said that he said the right things to get the job. The IPN may have been tasked with holding up a mirror to Poland's recent past but it could be one from a funhouse.<sup>39</sup>

The late Dr. Janusz Kurtyka, the director of the IPN from 2005 to 2010 played a key role in shaping the role of the IPN and historical policy, together with other historians such as Tomasz Wiścicki. A Western historian's blood may chill when they hear the phrase "historical policy": this smacks of the jackboot and blue pencil. Polish conservatives can present an argued case for such a policy since any debate has to be set against a context that has been never been experienced on Western university campuses.

For Kurtyka, what when on during the communist and postcommunist periods matters, and that was falsification, blatant cover-ups,

<sup>39</sup> <http://wyborcza.pl/10,82983,20434509,czy-pis-napisze-historie-od-nowa-jaroslaw-szarek-nowym-prezesem.html?disableRedirects=true>.

and manipulations, which must now to be redressed. We need to replace the missing pieces of the puzzle, and only then can we begin discussing the nuanced stuff that comprises historical debate. Filip Musiał, director of IPN Kraków, writes in his biographical essay: “The return to normality, according to him [Kurtyka], was therefore only possible after overcoming the ‘fluctuations of consciousness’ that characterize a post-totalitarian society. But national stabilization is only possible through the connection with the tradition of independence and the ditching of the post-communist heritage.” Thus, there is a “true” Polish history underneath the communist past and post-communist present. Is the latter, therefore, some sort of un-history to be airbrushed out of consciousness as merely some aberration?

Kurtyka was an opponent of the “pedagogics of shame,” i.e. criticizing previous ancestral decisions. “We need to build up in our country a sense of pride in our historical heritage. This is something that has been lacking or has been stifled by some opinion forming circles....” History is just one element in state building, not a separate independent way of thinking, and it can and should be taken from the national to the international level. “Historical policy is the legitimization of policy and national interest in the eyes of its own society and that of external opinion through historical argument.”

“Historical policy should be based on historical truth. It should draw on that great space that has been created by academic freedom, and this means academic conflict, debate, and the outlining of historical currents with which we disagree, and which have an obvious place in the debate.” So there is some allowance for dissent. But does this mean engaging in a debate with a Marxist or liberal?

The IPN is seen as an integral part of Poland’s culture wars. It is charged with knocking heroes off their pedestals and replacing them with new ones, all the while failing to realize that they all have feet of clay (see *Accursed Soldiers*, Bolek). Rather than fostering a healthy critical attitude towards history, which may be the hallmark of a mature society, it promotes a robust view of Polish history, especially to the young and especially those at university level.<sup>40</sup> Poland’s historians

<sup>40</sup> See the introductory page on website of the IPN: <https://ipn.gov.pl/en/about-the-ipn/2, Institute-of-National-Remembrance-Commission-for-the-Prosecution-of-Crimes-again.html>.

are ideological warriors too. Both postcommunists and conservatives (regarded as reactionaries) can at least agree on one thing: the need for heroes to lead the way.<sup>41</sup>

This is the background to the case of the role of President Lech Wałęsa. In this debate, his critics in the government and public are scoring palpable and convincing hits on his tenure as president of a free Poland and his leadership of the Solidarity trade union in the 1980s. If part of the historian's job is to redefine and reassess world-historical figures, then the problem with Wałęsa is that he is both a historic figure, and one that occupies the immediate and recent space of living memory, current affairs, and politics.<sup>42</sup>

In April 2016, the widow of the former head of the intelligence services, General Waldemar Kiszczak, presented the IPN with documents that included the file marked "Bolek," the codename of Lech Wałęsa when he acted as a paid informant for the security services during the 1970s. The people he informed on were colleagues at the shipyard he designated as subversives; later they were hounded until they quit their jobs, victimized, and rendered unemployable. He obtained 6000 zlotys over the years, a tidy sum, which his wife attributed to lottery winnings. His services were dispensed with in 1976.

Although the gist of Wałęsa's service was known and exposed by historian Sławomir Cenckiewicz in 2008, the content of the file was devastating, especially to the idea and legacy of Solidarity and the "Polish August" as a romantic Polish uprising that actually succeeded.<sup>43</sup> The former president's rebuttal was inchoate and rambling, and his assertion that he cooperated in order to play the security service against each other sounded less and less convincing and more and more panic-stricken. He said the people on whom he informed were little and insignificant, and it was all part of his master plan.

<sup>41</sup> Biuletyn IPN no 4 (137) April 2017 Pamięć a Polityka Historyczna. Essays on the philosophy of an historical policy as espoused by Dr. Janusz Kurtyka, Dr. Tomasz Merta, and President Lech Kaczyński. Biuletyn IPN no 3 March 2017 see essay Kajeta Rajski Pokolenie odzyskane? pp 62–67. Biuletyn IPN no 1–2 January 2017 Filip Musiał essay Wybór tradycji. Między Wolnością a Posttotalitaryzmem. Preface by Dr. Jacek Szarek with an overview of the current state of the political IPN mission. P 5. Essay by Filip Musiał on the postcommunist heritage, 7–19.

<sup>42</sup> See Jan Lityński, "Zdrowy rdzeń mówi: 'Dość,'" *Rzeczpospolita*, July 12, 2016.

<sup>43</sup> Timothy Garton Ash, *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity*, (London: Coronet Books, 1985).

PiS had always maintained that the transformation was tainted, that it was a sordid set up between the Marxist elite and the security services at the Round Table talks. In footage taken of the talks shown on public television, the viewer saw a convivial banquet heavily spiked with alcohol, bonhomie, and mutual admiration. This was the tipping point, the moment when workers lost, and Poland was set on its breakneck rush to a free market economy in which fortunes were made very quickly.<sup>44</sup> Instead of an uprising, it was another partition.

It was during the 1970s when Wałęsa signed the loyalty agreement to cooperate with the security services (his critics may point out that many resisted and did not sign), but it is his presidency in 1992 that is compromised. When looked at in this light, his actions to destroy his secret files or approve transfers of wealth, and his part in the downfall of the Olszewski government in 1992 may betray a man still in the orbit, if not under the direct influence, of the security services. This may lead an observer to the unpalatable conclusion that it was not Wałęsa who was the central figure, but Kiszczak. Both the intellectuals and the spooks successfully manipulated Wałęsa, with his ego and lack of acumen. The thought is too much to bear. In this case, PiS contradicts the romantic notion of the Polish uprising.

For the left and perhaps worldwide, Wałęsa's position and iconic status are beyond criticism. He remains the central figure in the drama. The very notion of questioning his centrality is absurd. PiS maintains a different picture, which stresses the other personalities that have been airbrushed out of the picture, such as Anna Walentynowicz. Under Jarosław Kaczyński's leadership, the party has also made a concerted effort to place the late Lech Kaczyński in a more prominent position in the narrative of the 1980s, a time in which he was a very minor actor. Is this repositioning or revisionism, or is it a personal vendetta? Lech Kaczyński is gradually being moved up in importance; he figured large in the Solidarity exhibition at the 2016 NATO Summit, and Wałęsa was airbrushed out of the picture.

<sup>44</sup> Cezary Gmyz and Antoni Dudek, *Taśma z Magdalenki*, TVP, February 26, 2016. This is a televised documentary showing recordings of the discussions between the opposition and the government that forms the creation myth of PiS.



Supporters argued that Wałęsa's cooperation with the security apparatus was a price worth paying for a bloodless revolution. PiS argues that it was a set up. Perhaps the real unsung heroes of Solidarity are those "little and insignificant" people whom Wałęsa ruined, and after whom no airport has been named.

#### WARSAW, '44 AND '16

Commemorations of the 1944 Warsaw Uprising in 2016 were mired in controversy, and they illustrated the forging of a link between the Uprising and the Smoleńsk air crash of 2010. Defense Minister Macierwicz had earlier decreed that together with the memorialization of the person or persons specifically being honored, a roll call of the deceased of the air crash was to be held at every public ceremony at which there is an army honor guard present.<sup>45</sup>

Macierwicz has made no secret about the fact that he regards the accident as an assassination. In spring 2015, he set up a committee to investigate the matter again, along with the shortcomings of the previous government's handling of the aftermath of the crash. This action was taken with one eye on likely prosecution. He has consistently used the word "*polegli*," meaning fallen in battle, to describe the deaths of those who did indeed die in the line of duty. This is a semantic usage but a clever and skillful one, as it conflates an air disaster that has not yet been fully explained, with the "glorious dead" of war.

The commemorations to honor the dead of Warsaw's most tragic episode normally have an honor guard present. The veterans' association protested this stipulation and wanted a roll call of only their own dead, arguing that it was fitting to honor Smoleńsk, but not at this particular ceremony. An uneasy stand off occurred, but some form of compromise was reached on July 25, 2016. Instead of the Smoleńsk roll call, the late president Lech Kaczyński and other significant individuals linked to the Warsaw Uprising Museum and similar institutions would be mentioned. The honor guard would stay. The mayor

<sup>45</sup> On PiS and Smoleńsk, see Paweł Wroński, "W szóstą rocznicę katastrofy smoleńskiej: Wojna PiS o duszę narodu," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, April 11, 2016; and on PiS and AK, see Marek Beylin, "Zawłaszczyc Trądy," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, August 2, 2016.

of Warsaw, Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz, sent a letter to Macierewicz to ask for the name of the late Władysław Bartosiewicz to be included. Bartosiewicz, a popular media figure, the former foreign minister, and advisor to the PO government, is a figure of odium for the right. He is seen as having been too ecumenical with Germans and Jews, although he was an insurgent during the rising itself. It was feared his name would add “oil to the fire.” He and others from the previous PO regime had been roundly booed and whistled at earlier such events. Not all the veterans were pleased.<sup>46</sup>

Macierewicz consciously placed the Smoleńsk tragedy in the same rank as the Warsaw Uprising: a peacetime accident with a wartime battle, and by implication with the tradition of Polish uprisings, which were tragic failures but moral victories. “*Gloria Victis*,” glory to the defeated, is inscribed on the monument in Warsaw’s Powązki Cemetery. Macierewicz’s message is clear: the nation may be beaten, but it cannot be conquered.

#### CONCLUSION: UNFINISHED BUSINESS

“When you dug up the bones of our heroes . . . you dug up the nation,” Defense Minister Macierewicz said to Professor Szwagrzyk, the head of the archaeological team that exhumed the bodies of Accursed Soldiers. It is the nation that pulls Poland through its difficulties, and this is a blood loyalty rather than a modern civic one. Historical policy is shaped in the light of a resurgent nation once again finding its feet after a quarter century of borrowed and failed liberal economic and social templates imported from the West.

In March 2016, Szydło returned from a resounding defeat in Brussels, where she failed to secure the re-nomination of Donald Tusk to the presidency of the European Commission. Poland was outvoted by twenty-seven to one, and was criticized for introducing personal

<sup>46</sup> Jerzy S Majewski, “Powstanie: obchody bez zgody,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, August 2, 2016. See the report on the commemorations and veterans by Janina Blikowska, “Apel o Prawdę,” *Rzeczpospolita*, August 2, 2016. See also Jerzy S. Majewski and Tomasz Urzykowski, “Powstanie Warszawskie. Bez gwizdów, ale znów z wiecem. Na Powązkach zabrakło milczenia,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, August 2, 2016.

animus against Tusk into the debate. Yet Szydło was greeted as a conquering hero upon her return to Poland. This was the point. She had won a moral victory, one of principle. Poland was standing firm against the shifting sands of Western European politics. Her appeals to Europe to rise from its knees regarding the Islamic threat and to Poland to leave behind the past twenty years of political conformism were in the same vein. She drew upon the deep romanticism in Polish thinking and the historical conflicts outlined above. The principled stand, even if defeated, is a victory, and in the end, it may even ultimately be vindicated.

In the light of German and Russian historical policies, both well financed and organized, Poland has to fight back even more aggressively with its own.<sup>47</sup> So PiS may have the last laugh. For the moment though, soft power is for softies.

<sup>47</sup> See "Czy Niemiecka Wizja Historii Musi Wygrać?" *Rzeczpospolita Plus Minus*, no. 40 (October 7–8, 2017); Patria Nostra/IPN historical conference "Prawda historyczna a odpowiedzialność prawna. Rozważania na gruncie zniekształcenia pamięci o niemieckich zbrodniach popełnionych podczas II Wojny Światowej," held November 8, 2017, <http://patrianostra.org.pl/5/konferencje>. For the counterpoint, see Professor Andrzej Friszke, "Fałszerze historii," *Newsweek* 47, November 6–12 2017.

## POLAND'S CULTURE OF COMMEMORATION

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EWA STAŃCZYK

I remember the exact moment when the politics of memory became an all-pervading subject in the public discourse in Poland. It was more than a decade ago. Jan Tomasz Gross's *Neighbors* had just been published and both PiS (Law and Justice) and PO (Civic Platform) were rapidly becoming influential voices in Polish politics.

I read *Neighbors* while I was still an undergraduate. I read it belatedly, some years after it had been originally published, but I was immediately struck by the relevance of the debate it had triggered and the vehemence with which these issues were being discussed.

Looking back at that period, I can say with certainty that this was when I first experienced the pervasiveness of political discourse, its propensity to antagonize and divide, and most crucially, its vitriolic language. To someone who came of age after the fall of communism, and who did not experience any major political upheavals first hand, it was bewildering. The vitriol seeped into seemingly innocuous private conversations, turning them into highly emotional and adversarial displays of political sympathies. It was an unwelcome intrusion, but nonpartisanship was not an option. For many of my generation, then in our late teens and early twenties, this was the period when our political allegiances were shaped.

The topic of Gross's book, the pogrom in Jedwabne, quickly became a national cause célèbre. To those, like myself, who saw themselves as liberal and progressive, the debate was a way of rethinking the ossified concepts of national identity that had been heavily anchored in the romantic, that is to say nineteenth-century ideas of

bravery and victimhood. Poles were no longer to be seen solely as martyrs and heroes. Like the Nazis, they were also perpetrators. To many of us, the discussion was an excuse for blatant manifestations of a pro-European sentiment and, by association, self-righteousness.

In contrast, to some of my friends, declared Christian Democrats, Gross's book was an attack on this romantic nineteenth-century vision of Polishness, which they had come to see as impervious to the vicissitudes of history and, as such, were indisputable. The debates we were having were difficult at times, we were belligerent and passionate, but they always ended with a truce; what brought us together was still more important than what divided us.

The Jedwabne controversy, and many similar debates that followed, was symptomatic of a wider rhetorical shift that was beginning to take place in Polish politics and, concurrently, within society itself in the early 2000s. This shift towards the narrative of "us and them" brought about a radical polarization of public discourse. This rhetorical schism, which became more prominent in the wake of PiS's electoral success in 2005, came to determine the way in which political elites and citizens alike positioned themselves in relation to the national past. The schism deepened after the crash of the presidential plane in Smoleńsk in 2010, when Polish society seemed to have drastically split into two opposing camps: one that viewed the accident as the "second Katyń," supported conspiracy theories and vilified Donald Tusk as the Kremlin's stooge, and the other, which saw it as a tragic event that could have been prevented if flight safety standards had been met.

This was a period when friendships were compromised and adulterated by debates carried out at the state level. This was also the period when emotions began to play a more important role in political life, and the pragmatic, and largely positivist, voice of the then-ruling PO became subdued and silenced by the increasingly rabid and romantic parlance of PiS. Unsurprisingly, as it trickled down to the public, affecting large sections of society, the debate on collective memory replicated the simplistic binaries with which PiS and PO, respectively, came to be associated, such as the binaries of ethnocentrism and cosmopolitanism, Euroscepticism and pro-Europeanness, and xenophobia and tolerance, among others.

To a scholar exploring collective memory, this dichotomy seemed fascinating at first. But as the supporters of PiS and PO, be it local citizens, NGOs, or public figures, echoed the two governing discourses, Poland's culture of commemoration quickly turned stale, predictable, and repetitive, and a more nuanced discussion of the past was largely absent. Devoid of other distinct voices, public history soon became constrained by the same familiar scenario: a tiresome *pas de deux* of affected pluralism (a form of purported rehabilitation and repair) and unbridled nationalism (a means of completing the "unfinished revolution" of 1989).

Remembering the Holocaust became *de rigueur* with PO and its voters, with the familiar refrain of "it must not happen again" resounding in their commemorative mantra. Like many others in Europe including PO, the remembrance of the Shoah was chiefly a didactic endeavor, a form of rhetorical redress and a vehicle for the conventional wisdom that commemorating atrocity prevents its repetition. But as many commentators have pointed out, celebrating the Jewish past was also PO's way of ingratiating themselves with Europe, which, up until recently, saw the memory of the Shoah as a yardstick with which to measure which states were civil and democratic and which ones were not. In Poland, this resulted in a curious phenomenon, which I described elsewhere as "orphan culture," namely a combination of a nostalgic longing for the vanished Polin (Yiddish for Poland) and a desire to rebuild this lost realm as a gentile-only creation and with a largely gentile audience in mind.

But it is PiS that has always been more passionate about the past and, in fact, more successful in fashioning historical events into mainstays of national identity and turning anniversaries into grandiose public events. The spectacular success of the Warsaw Rising Museum (2004), a brainchild of the then Warsaw mayor Lech Kaczyński, was a timely antidote to the post-Jedwabne malaise. The museum was to reinstate the three pillars of national identity—God, honor, fatherland—and restore pride in the Polish national past. It did so with panache; the museum turned out to be visitor friendly, interactive, and visually appealing, the first institution of this kind in the country. It was an instant success, and even though the Polono-centric narrative jarred some guests, visitor numbers went through

the roof. To this day, the museum is seen as *pièce de résistance* of PiS's historical politics and an important legacy of the late Lech Kaczyński.

Museums, alongside memorials, were soon to become the main instruments of memory creation, and indeed contestation, and this is where the commemorative battles, both big and small, have been fought. At the forefront of these commemorations have been local governments, many of them with PO mayors at the helm, which were often able to capitalize on the multicultural legacies of their regions and turn the remnants of Jewish or German heritage, depending on location, into backbones of local identity. This, in turn, enabled them to fashion their localities into havens of progress, tolerance, and Europeanness. At the same time, we have also seen increased participation from other actors such as NGOs, veterans' associations, informal groups of local citizens, and schools. On the one hand, this growing importance of municipalities was, of course, an outcome of the administrative reform undertaken in the late 1990s, which brought a decentralization of power and gave more agency to local governments. The inclusion of other actors, on the other hand, spoke to a growing civil society, which was slowly awakening from the stupor induced by the decades of passivity under communism. These important changes meant that there was a relative level-playing field, at least in theory, where commemorative projects were concerned, and that the citizens were able to monitor and contest the actions of their local councils as well as voice opinions about their decisions.

An interesting case in point is a Kindertransport statue in Gdańsk, which was funded by the city in 2008. The memorial is part of a wider European project that commemorated Jewish children of the Free City of Danzig who escaped the threat of National Socialism to the safety of Britain in 1938 and 1939. The monument is an illustrative example of the forward-looking reconciliatory commemorative culture promoted by the city mayor and a PO politician, Paweł Adamowicz. And yet, soon after the unveiling, the statue became the focus of a heated debate between the mayor, who put forward the idea for the project, and a group of conservative right-wing citizens who saw it as anti-Polish and damaging to national interests. The citizens proposed that a similar memorial to Roman Catholic children should be erected

to commemorate those minors who perished in air strikes, concentration camps, or while fighting the Nazis.

Although the debate was undoubtedly a local variation of the ongoing “memory wars” carried out by PO and PiS at state level, the controversy also spoke to a profoundly affective dimension of such sites. In fact, the memorial turned into a source of intense communal anxiety and fear, which quickly spiraled into full-blown hostility and rage. What is interesting, these responses to the memorial came dangerously close to the traditional anti-Jewish animus in that they were undergirded by an implicit and unarticulated imagery of the “enemy.”

While the Kindertransport controversy was largely confined to the local level, it reflected a broader power struggle over the remembrance of ethnic and religious minorities, Jews in particular, and demonstrated how the narratives of the past proposed by the political elites in Warsaw reverberated in other Polish cities. But this was not the only time that the city found itself engulfed in a debate of this kind. Following PiS’s return to power in November 2015, another scramble for the past began to unfold in Gdańsk, one that not only concerned the commemoration of the Jewish experience but of World War Two in general.

On April 15, 2016, the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage announced plans to merge two museums that are currently in the planning stage—the Museum of World Two in Gdańsk and the Westerplatte Museum, which is devoted to the first battle of the war in September 1939. Even though both are state-funded projects, their provenance is very different. The former is a pet project of the Tusk government, and in fact the initial idea for the museum was put forward in 2008 during his time as the Prime Minister. The latter came to life in December 2015 following PiS’s electoral success. The ideological underpinnings of both institutions vary, oscillating between a much broader view of Poland as one of the many participants of the conflict with her own share of triumphs and suffering, on one hand, and a vision which privileges Polish (in this context Roman Catholic) victimization and heroism, on the other.

It is not surprising then that the decision to merge the two museums met with vehement protest from the opposition party PO and the more liberal sections of society, who felt that the fusing of the two



institutions might compromise the original idea of the World War Two Museum as a platform for representing a much wider narrative of that period that does not succumb to interests of one nation-state and does not privilege one national, ethnic, or religious group over another. At the same time, the Westerplatte Museum, commissioned by PiS, has been seen by the PO supporters as a possible outlet for brandishing a nationalistic vision of the past that might further antagonize Poland's neighbors and the EU more generally. PiS was equally critical of their predecessors' memory project. According to Piotr Gliński, the new Minister of Culture, PO's "universalistic historical politics" were an attempt to consign the national past to a "post-historical" realm that goes against the *zeitgeist*, particularly the necessity for continued nation-building. Often viewed as Tusk's hobbyhorse, the museum creators have also been (unfairly) depicted as bowing to external pressure, chiefly from conservative German politicians such as Erika Steinbach, the former president of the Federation of Expellees, whose unshakable resolve regarding the commemoration of post-World War Two German expellees attracted widespread criticism not only in Poland, but also in other European states.

As the Gdańsk duologue continues, each of the two main interlocutors gradually departs from their typical parlance. The histrionic manner of PiS, to which we have become accustomed over the years, is slowly turning into one of equanimity and poise, a sign of the party's strengthening power and, alas, impunity. In stark contrast, PO's normally self-possessed voice is quivering, and there seems to be a mounting cognizance that this might be the opposition party's last hurrah. And while PO still seems to be hopeful that the "illiberal turn," which we have been witnessing since PiS's ascendance to power, can be reversed, the debate on the national past is becoming increasingly emotional and frenetic. Since April 2016, when the planned changes to the status of the World War Two Museum were first announced, the museum's original faction, including its director Paweł Machcewicz and Gdańsk PO mayor, Paweł Adamowicz, have acted frantically, to say the least. Adamowicz, in particular, has been struggling to assert his authority as an independent self-governing mayor, veering between threats to reclaim the plot of land that the municipality donated to the museum and attempts to appease the new

government with ostentatious assurances that the national narrative is indeed at the heart of the permanent exhibition. For some time now, we have seen signs of exasperation, irritation, and helplessness on the part of PO. The tables have turned, and both parties are acutely aware of that.

The case of Gdańsk is illustrative of how memorials and museums have been used by the two parties in the legitimization of power and the wider process of national identity formation. This phenomenon is not, of course, restricted to Poland. It is, in fact, an important aspect of public history in democratic and autocratic states alike. But the binary division intrinsic to Poland's commemorative culture, and the multiplicity of agents involved in the remembrance of the past at both state and local level, have meant that it has been largely reduced to an endless, and curiously dialogical, creation (and contestation) of new sites of memory. Museums, in particular, have been used as platforms for the expression of competing visions of the past and as tools in the struggle for hegemony. For instance, Warsaw's POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, inaugurated in 2013, quickly found its counterpart in the Ulm Family Museum, opened in 2016 in the village of Markowa in southeastern Poland. While the former could be considered a showcase of PO's pluralistic culture of memory with its emphasis on the importance of Jewish legacy, the latter, proposed by a PiS-dominated Subcarpathian Regional Assembly, is an example of a Polonocentric take on the "Jewish" aspect of World War Two, for it focuses on the "Righteous Among the Nations," those Christian Poles who rescued Jews.

The museum in Markowa is representative of PiS's wider approach to the Polish-Jewish past. After all, PiS's interventions on this topic are often nationalistic in tone and exceedingly protective of Polish interests, in that they tend to marginalize the Shoah as irrelevant to Poland's national past and stress the contribution of the Catholic population to rescuing Jews under the Nazis instead. It is commonly known that the history of Catholic-Jewish relations in Poland, and particularly the history of anti-Semitism, is a sensitive topic for the majority of PiS and its voters. Thus, the ruling party typically sees debates on this issue as downplaying the bravery and persecution of Roman Catholics during World War Two, and shifting attention away from German guilt.

With the proliferation of anti-democratic tendencies following the 2015 election, there is a looming danger that discussions on Polish anti-Semitism will continue to be suppressed and viewed as intrinsically anti-Polish, as seen in the firing of Krzysztof Persak, a former IPN employee and a co-author of a two-volume anthology of documents on Jedwabne, who was dismissed following the appointment of a new IPN director, Jarosław Szarek. At the same time, while PiS's historical politics is hardly a conundrum, particularly where these divisive issues are concerned, it is devoid of overt anti-Jewish animus that many of its opponents so readily ascribe to PiS. In fact, the party's approach to the past illustrates forcefully its extraordinary ability to fine-tune its discourse depending on the context and the perceived needs of the nation.

One instance of such "fine-tuning" is a speech given by Jarosław Kaczyński following the seventy-fifth anniversary of the burning of the Great Synagogue in Białystok where 2,000 local Jews were killed by the Nazis. The crime, perpetrated on June 27, 1941, was to be mirrored by Christian Poles in Jedwabne only two weeks later. During his speech on June 27, 2016, Kaczyński emphasized the importance of commemorating the cycle of violence initiated by the Nazi invasion of Poland in 1939 and the necessity of remembering that it was the Third Reich and the conformity of its citizens that were purportedly to be blamed for the atrocity, even if Poles also played a role in the so-called Final Solution. He warned that Europe was facing a renewed threat of anti-Semitism and this, he claimed, was most visible in attacks on the state of Israel, which he then went on to describe as the haven of "our culture" in the Middle East.

Kaczyński's speech is interesting for several reasons. Not only does it employ the familiar narrative of German responsibility for the Holocaust, in general, and for Jedwabne, in particular, but also utilizes a time-honored strategy of othering. In this case it is used to warn against the enemies of Israel. Although these enemies remain unnamed, it is clear that Kaczyński alludes here to the Muslim world and, by association, to Muslim refugees, who are presented as a threat to the so-called "our culture." Thus, his eagerness to condemn anti-Semitism and support Israel's national interests stems solely from his fierce anti-immigrant stance. And yet, it is not his implied position on immigration that is most surprising here. After all, it was PiS's refusal

to kowtow to Europe in the midst of the refugee crisis in the summer of 2015 that lay at the basis of the party's electoral success. Instead, it is the doublespeak that Kaczyński employs in his address and the underlying odium that turn out to be the most astonishing and menacing aspects of his speech. Using the past to comment on the present, Kaczyński succeeded in portraying the Muslims as the devil. This strategy was consistently used by the party during its electoral campaign, and it is this dramatic fear mongering that enabled PiS to capitalize on collective fears and anxieties. This is how, once more, affect came to play an important role in shaping the political mood in the country as well as popular responses to contemporary events.

This affective dimension of politics and the intertwining of the past and present was particularly visible during an anti-immigration and anti-Muslim protest, which took place in Wrocław in mid-November 2015, shortly after the elections. The demonstration was organized by several far-right groups, such as the neo-fascist All-Polish Youth, and was accompanied by the burning of an effigy of a Hassidic Jew. While it is not entirely clear why the protesters chose to do that, there is no doubt that anti-Jewish symbols play a prominent role in Poland's nationalistic catechism and, as such, resonate loudly with far-right groups.

After all, anti-Semitic imagery and language have been traditionally used as the key to deeper levels of hostility and jingoistic rage, irrespective of the target, and we have seen examples of that in other contexts, from chants at football stadiums to homophobic graffiti. Thus, the events in Wrocław, which were quickly condemned by the non-aligned city mayor, demonstrate how PiS's electoral campaign managed to instigate moral panic amongst some citizens on one hand, and mobilize indignant members of society on the other. The latter, in particular, responded to the party's anti-immigrant rhetoric with alacrity, while PiS's subsequent return to power created an alarming culture of acceptance for acts such as this. It remains to be seen how Poland's culture of remembrance develops hereafter. It is likely though that PiS's rapidly escalating "monopower," to recontextualize Kaczyński's own term, will reduce the memorial landscape to morbid patriotism and the cult of fallen heroes. With the continuous purging of PO politicians and their stalwarts from public institutions, the commemorative *pas de deux* is coming to an end. PiS is the sovereign. It

is a hard-won hegemony, one that the party will surely revel in as they keep on capitalizing on the nation's fears, Islamophobia in particular. As for the past, it will continue to be reinvented. Crypts will be reopened and ransacked for evidence of former glory, inconvenient heroes will be erased from history, run-of-the-mill men will be elevated to the national pantheon, and whistle-blowers will be rebuked and banished to obscurity. And as PiS develops that discrete memory project, their supporters and sycophants will follow suit. This is when the speechifying might turns into unapologetic savagery, as it inspires a fierce animus against one of the nation's purported enemies, be they communists, Jews, or Muslims. It is that vulgarized version of PiS's historical politics that we should fear the most, for it might bring gore and horror, and we may see, once more, how "the righteous" are being led astray.

## POLAND'S THEATER OF DEATH

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DARIUSZ CZAJA

History is not only a matter of politics. It is impossible to reduce history to individual events strung along a causal link. The past consists not only of the most visible and frequently described “foam of events,” but also the whole sphere of semi-palpable anticipations, beliefs, images, and phantasms, what anthropology refers to as collective mythology, that which creates spaces of “long duration,” a substratum upon which the political element is built.

If one looks upon the last two hundred years of Polish history (the third partition of Poland in 1795 may serve as a turning point) from the point of view of the history of ideas—and if the history of Poles is considered from the viewpoint of collective psychology—then it would be easy to find a solid component in this panoramic image: the figure of death and the topos of death. In the first instance, it is the real death of real people filling real cemeteries. But over these corpses and over all these years, a thick symbolic shroud has been woven.

There is probably no doubt that this black thread of mourning deeply penetrates the tissue of Polish life. And this is true for many areas of life. This runs from a specific model of Polish Catholicism (with the strongly expressed theme of a crucified Christ), through to behavior in the public space (funerals of great artists and politicians, which become spectacles of patriotism) and works of art (theaters filled with spirits of the dead and great movie achievements).

Death may be a master in Germany, but apparently, it does not do too badly for itself in Poland either. For the past two centuries, it has been a non-negotiable element of our symbolic equipment, an ideological foundation of the Polish collective imagination. Death, or a black banner, serves as a large umbrella under which we can all find

shelter. Death in its essence—experienced, shown, played—has occupied a prime position in Polish mythology over the last two centuries. And such mythology, as I understand it here, is not just fiction, falsehood, or fabrication. Although it has been interwoven with beliefs and ideas, it leads a real life of its own and has real power over the thinking and behavior of those who believe in it.

In the author's note to the second part of his novel, *Forefathers' Eve*, Poland's most famous writer Adam Mickiewicz,<sup>1</sup> feels compelled to explain why he had given his drama such a quaint title. This is the name, he explained, of the ceremonies held in remembrance of their forefathers, that is collective deceased ancestors celebrated among common folk in many districts of Lithuania, Prussia, and Courland. He also added that since the clergy had sought to eradicate the custom, "the populace celebrates its forefathers secretly close to the cemetery, in chapels or empty houses." Mickiewicz sensed it well: "the spirit of Polishness" lives in a cemetery, or in its vicinity. He recognized the needs of the national community in his masterly drama and gave it a theatrical dimension, furnishing Polish consciousness (and sub-consciousness) and codifying the rules of the national and patriotic game for a long time.

Whether we know it or not, whether we want it or not, whether we like it or not, we are all the product of our forefathers. From the theater and from rites our modern founding myth comes forth. At the same time, it is perhaps not surprising, that having been deprived of its statehood, nineteenth-century Poland (with an extension to 1918) was so strongly rooted in the romantic drama and in the November festival of the dead: the Forefathers' Eve. The communion of the living and the dead became a national ritual, and that parlance of corpses appealed to Poles in a special way. The surprising thing is that the restoration of independence, two World Wars, communist ideology and, as we shall see, dogmatic capitalism undermined the myth very little. We still find ourselves in a theatrical gesture of communing with the dead in the All Soul's day rite. A past strewn with corpses

<sup>1</sup> *Dziady* (*Forefathers' Eve*) is a poetic drama by the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz. It is considered one of the great works of European Romanticism. *Dziady* has been seen as a realization of Romantic drama theory, to be ranked with such works as Goethe's *Faust* and Byron's *Manfred*.

and ghosts is not an alien world for us. On the contrary, this is where we feel most at home.

A significant fact is that when staged after World War Two, *Forefather's Eve* was more than just a routine item in the theatrical repertoire for Polish consciousness. It became a national cause. It was not only theater, it was, or so the audience perceived it to be, presented as a dramatic form of life, our life. The forefathers of Swinarski, Dejmek, and Grzegorzewski<sup>2</sup> became a remarkably sensitive seismograph of Polish mentality; we have viewed and interpreted them, but they have also watched and interpreted us. And the *Gardzienice Sorcery* of Stanisławski<sup>3</sup> distills—via Mickiewicz's text—the spiritual essence of Polishness. *The Dead Class*, *Wielopole*, and *I Shall Never Return* by Tadeusz Kantor<sup>4</sup>—what are these if not a Jewish variation on the summoning of the dead or the invocation of spirits? Jan Kott wrote about this: "Shortly before the end of the presentation, piled on tables and stools, and school benches in *The Dead Class*, actors and mannequins sit tight as if glued into each other. The priest in turn calls forth the dead by name and surname. Kantor celebrated his Forefathers' Eve for the last time."<sup>5</sup>

And the November All Saint's Day? We still feel a secret closeness with it regardless of our degree of religious commitment, which often becomes a keystone of the family—and national—identity. When asked about his views of our country in the beginning of the 1990s, Andrzej Dudziński, the outstanding Polish graphic artist who worked in New York for many years, replied: "You know, it reminds me of

<sup>2</sup> Konrad Swinarski, Kazimierz Dejmek and Jerzy Grzegorzewski were all influential theater directors. See also: "Okno do środka. Rozmowa z Andrzejem Dudzińskim," *Tygodnik Powszechny*, no. 1 (1992); Stanisław Rosiek, *Zwłoki Mickiewicza. Próba nekrografii poety* (Gdańsk: Słowo/Obraz Terytoria, 1997); Andrzej Stasiuk, *Dziennik pisany później* (Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> An auteur theater project founded by Włodmierz Stanisławski in 1977. It has since gained the status of one of the most important experimental theaters in the world, staging an "anthropological" approach to theater at numerous festivals across the globe. *Gardzienice's* performances have been described as "musical theater," "ethno-oratorios," and "allegorical theater of song."

<sup>4</sup> Tadeusz Kantor (April 6, 1915–December 8, 1990) is renowned for his revolutionary theatrical performances in Poland and abroad. See Jan Kott, *Kadysz. Strony o Tadeuszu Kantorze* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo słowo/obraz terytoria, 2006); Dariusz Kosiński, *Teatra polskie. Rok katastrofy* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



visits to my Grandma. They have always been associated with All Saints Day—I also participated recently in the event and suddenly remembered what it means and how important it is. I remember that we often went to our grandmother's, to Tczew, and there we would visit the graves. [...] And this is what Poland means to me. This is All Saints Day, from which we escaped to those graves.”

The collective mind defines the festive hierarchy in its own image and likeness, while often ignoring the official religious dogma. Observing the November mobilization of Poles, one might think that during these two November days, including All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day, we celebrate our most important Catholic holidays. And like Mickiewicz' forefathers, here too a pagan substrata emerges through the Christian surface layer. Andrzej Stasiuk wrote about this after a visit to the monumental temple in Lichen (“The Eastern Sagrada Familia and the Taj Mahal of my country”). “No, God has never been needed here, only dozens, hundreds of saints floating in the air like ghosts, plus their goddess. The bones under the earth, the ghosts in the air.”

If you look at this relentless experiencing, remembering, and re-creating death in life and art in Poland, perhaps instead of the eagle, the Polish coat of arms should have a grave or coffin as its emblem. Anyway, from the mythological perspective, Poland turns out to be a vast necropolis. Permanent mourning is a way of life, and our mental historiography turns, thus, into necrography.

In the Polish imagination, the paradigm of the romantic experience of death and its place at the center of communal life still reigns over souls. We are still suffering from our own native version of “*Sein zum Tode*”—implanted in us by the Great Romantics. Death is our national totem. And as in the past, we gather around it during special moments even today.

The ritual and symbolic space, which opened Mickiewicz's drama and religious festival, is reflected in many events of contemporary public life. The All Saints' Day theater has occupied a privileged place for a long time. It is, self-consciously, referred to on the occasion of anniversaries of lost uprisings and battles. It creates an appropriate context for their commemoration. It is convenient and important as a performative model of living history.

Jacek Dobrowolski wrote with remarkable accuracy about the durability of this kind of participation in the celebration of historical disasters: "From the battlefield we import to the ecclesiastical and national sanctuaries the remains of those who fed Motherland-Poland with their own blood, honoring them as relics of Christian martyrs and caring more for them than our living fellow humans. We take greater satisfaction in dealing with the dead during the call of the fallen than in getting to know those who are alive and co-existing with us. We enjoy the role of deep mourners, thus giving testimony of our martyrdom and masochistic narcissism and love our own sufferings more than trying to find the truth, which might undermine such suffering. The cult of the suffering Christ is closer to us—the Resurrected One—and thus we worship defeat rather than national victories."<sup>6</sup>

#### SHADOWS OF SMOLEŃSK

A rare opportunity to trace the persistence of this model of responding to traumatic events was created by the national catastrophe of the presidential plane crash near Smoleńsk in April 2010.

It initially triggered ritual behavior that lasted for weeks (and later months), which appeared to be a seamless move from the Wilno-Kowno Forefathers to the Forefathers of Smoleńsk. Once again, beneath the thin fabric of modernity, a romantic screen shone. It could be found in the particular funeral rhetoric of the time, in the mass performance on the streets (under the Cross at Krakowskie Przedmieście in Warsaw), the burial of victims of the catastrophe, and was especially spectacular in the circumstances surrounding the funeral of the presidential couple at Wawel royal castle in Kraków. In observing all these events, it was hard to not take the position that the nineteenth century lives on in twenty-first-century Poland.

Leaving aside the political turmoil concerning the process of deciding where it should be held, the funeral of the presidential couple had the same ideological and symbolic background as other major fu-

<sup>6</sup> Jacek Dobrowolski, "Dziady, czyli nie wszystko. Próba rekonstrukcji polskiego Dionizosa," *Teatr*, no. 11.1.122000).

nerals of the last two centuries: the transfer of Mickiewicz's corpse from Montmorency to Wawel in 1890, the mourning ceremonies associated with the burial of the ashes of Słowacki in the Wawel crypt in 1927, and the funeral of Marshal Piłsudski and the burial of his body in the Wawel cemetery in 1935. And just as in those cases, the funeral of the presidential couple became a rather pathetic theater of national mourning, resurrecting not only romantic rhetoric, but also recalling the memory of the old Polish funeral, i.e., grand theatrical staging known as *pompa funebris*. The tragic death of the presidential couple had to be completed with a ritual, and the ritual scenario repeated sequences known from the past.

Dariusz Kosinski, chronicler of the Smoleńsk performance art, wrote, "Now, when it has already been recognized that the president and his entourage are national heroes and their death sparked massive dramatic activities, the grand finale of the whole cycle had to be a sublime act, exceeding everything done before and at the same time following the stream of national and ecclesiastical traditions. Nothing could replace the role of the monumental burial, the only truly monumental funeral was possible at Wawel."<sup>7</sup> The Wawel carnival ended the period of national mourning not only symbolically, but it also transferred the presidential couple from the normal, human, mortal dimension into the heroic (in some versions martyrological) dimension of immortality.

The funeral of the presidential couple at the Wawel Castle was a consequence of the logic of the mourning drama and was designed to unite the politically divided national community (although, as one recalls it had exactly the opposite effect: the funeral was the beginning of a split within the national community, or perhaps just it disclosure). I do not care at all, however, about the political dimensions of the event. From the cultural point of view, something else is important: the mournful spectacle was a prerequisite of a patriotically exalted, mythological death. Once again, as in the last two centuries of Polish history, mortal remains do not end their life in the grave, but enter the symbolic universe with great force. Freed from their corporeality, they commence a new life in another dimension. The

<sup>7</sup> Dariusz Kosiński, *Teatra polskie. Rok katastrofy* (Kraków, Znak: 2013).

dead are no longer among us, but have power over us. The tomb of the presidential couple was semiotically marked and now radiates outside. Corpses engage symbolically, exert pressure, act, unite, and divide. One thing is certain: the dead still speak to us from the "life" of the grave; we need them and they need us. It is we who put dead bodies abandoned by souls in motion. And the fate of the living is the major stake in this game.

If this briefly outlined image of the Polish theater of death is correct, it raises an important question: how should we think about the overrepresentation of corpses, spirits, and ghosts in the Polish imagination today? How does Poland's thanatophilia look in the context of a future-oriented, uniting, and secularizing Europe? It seems that there is no simple and conclusive answer to these questions. And in any case, the Polish voice is very diverse. Considering the performances during the seasonal invocation of the spirits, this persistent presence of the metaphysics of death in contemporary Polish mythology is very differently evaluated both in journalism and in everyday thinking. Warring parties are well entrenched in their positions, which virtually prevents any discussion. At the same time, it is worth noting that any assessment of the Polish mythology of death does not necessarily coincide with one's political sympathies. Here, it seems, is more at stake: two different models of experiencing history and two different concepts of national memory.

Hence, "mythmakers" tend to see the brighter side in thinking about our present and the past in terms of death (the romantic phantasm of "Poland as the Christ of nations"; national history understood as a permanent Souls' Day revival). Moreover, they find a symbolic idiom of the Polish "national character," a sign of identity in it, which helps find acknowledgment among the mentally formatted European nations. "Mythbreakers," in turn, consider this type of thinking a historical burden that needs to be shed as soon as possible. They claim that this type of thinking is anachronistic and preserves our mentality in a thick martyrological sauce. Moreover, it ostentatiously does not fit into the new, future-oriented priorities of modern Europe.

## DMOWSKI-PIŁSUDSKI VS. SIENKIEWICZ-GOMBROWICZ

It has been said sometimes that Polish political thought is still ruled by two coffins: Dmowski's and Piłsudski's. It is difficult to say whether this sentence fully reflects the current reality. To me another conviction rings truer: namely, that two other coffins govern Polish collective mythology and symbolic imagination, those of Sienkiewicz and Gombrowicz.<sup>8</sup> These two names are legible emblems of two antagonistic attitudes. Either we invigorate hearts or carp on about superstitions. Either we reinforce a Pole in a Pole, or we derive a Pole from a Pole. Either we consolidate the native dump or we state our European modernity. Either we find eternal trauma and dotage, or sobriety and intellectual maturity. These coffins carry very different sets of values.

But the matter does not seem so simple to me. This rigid division looks good only on paper. Certainly it neatly outlines the general direction of the dispute, but, while sharpening the edges of both positions, it does not allow them to capture some subtlety nor to draft an intermediate position. So how do we get out of this trap?

In this context, the comments of Maria Janion,<sup>9</sup> who was a proponent of the thesis of the undiminished power of the Romantic paradigm in Poland's post-war history for many years, are of great interest. Some time ago, when commenting on Ortega y Gasset's thesis about the importance of the past for building an individual and national identity, she wrote emphatically: "Culture must go with their dead, we have to go with our dead, and it is basic for us to know that

<sup>8</sup> Henryk Sienkiewicz (1846–1916) was a Polish journalist, novelist, and a Nobel Prize laureate. He is best remembered for his historical novels, especially for his internationally known best-seller *Quo Vadis* (1896). Witold Marian Gombrowicz (1904–69) was a Polish writer. His works are characterized by deep psychological analysis, a certain sense of paradox and absurd, anti-nationalist flavor. In 1937, he published his first novel, *Ferdynand*, which presented many of his usual themes: the problems of immaturity and youth, the creation of identity in interactions with others, and an ironic, critical examination of class roles in Polish society and culture. He gained fame only during the last years of his life but is now considered one of the foremost figures of Polish literature.

<sup>9</sup> Maria Janion is a theoretician of literature. She is a professor at the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences, specializing in literary Romanticism. Jacek Dobrowolski, "Dziady, czyli nie wszystko. Próba rekonstrukcji polskiego Dionizosa," *Teatr*, no. 11.1.122000; Maria Janion, *Do Europy tak, ale razem z naszymi umarłymi* (Warszawa: Sic!, 2000); "Najwyższym szczęściem dzieci ziemi jest jedynie osobowość," *Konteksty*, nos. 3–4 (1995).

they are with us. ... I have often pointed out that Polish culture is a culture of mourning, solemnly renewed once a year. And here Mickiewicz was right when he wrote in the preface to the French-language version of *Forefathers' Eve*, that the communication between the visible and the invisible world, the living and the dead, is an important feature of Polish culture. During his Parisian lectures he discussed this as a significant feature of all Slavic culture." Many years later Janion wrote: "To Europe, yes—but only with our dead"; the phrase became the title of her book.

The thoughts of this talented interpreter of the works of Polish Romanticism well illustrate the essence of the problem. What are we really referring to here? We are not dealing with a simple reproduction of the martyrdom cliché of romantic origin. At the beginning of the transformation in the early 1990s, Janion argued it was already the twilight of the Romantic paradigm in the Polish mentality. She wrote and spoke several times about the negative influence (especially on vulnerable young people) of the romantic cult of the victim and the contemplation of death.

When criticizing the historical reconstructions played out periodically on the streets of the capital, among others, scenes from the Warsaw Uprising where "old combatants and militarized children" meet, she argued about the spread of a genuine death syndrome. It is difficult to suspect her of naïve and slavish submission to romantic rhetoric, and the sentences cited here cannot be regarded as adherence to the nationalist camp or some form of postmodern fascination with death.

Janion's position is worthy of attention for one fundamental reason: it clearly shows that the modern memory of the dead and the strong appreciation of the presence of death in the Polish imagination, though, no doubt, of romantic origin, is not—and certainly does not have to be—a simple and regressive repetition of history. It does not have to be bewitched by death or some half-mad religion of death proclaimed by death's indomitable knight—Jarosław Rymkiewicz.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz (Jarosław Marek Szulc; born 1935) is a Polish poet, essayist, dramatist, and literary critic. As a poet, he is influenced by the traditions of classicism and the baroque. He has received multiple prizes for his novels, essays, and translations, including the Kościelski Prize (1967), S. Vincenz Prize (1985), and the Polish PEN Club Prize. His volume of poetry *Zachód słońca w Milanówku* (Warszawa: Sic!, 2003) won the prestigious Nike Award in 2003.

Developing this thought briefly, it seems to me that one can still think about *Forefathers' Eve* and its spiritual and culture-making dimension without falling into extremes. In other words, you can go beyond the supposedly intellectually compelling, alternative outlined earlier. So it is not that we are all stuck in a seductive trap or that we are governed by some form of fatalism. It is neither a drastic cutting of the vertical historical threads nor an immersion into the amnesia of liberal modernity nor a mad vision of the collective *Sein zum Tode*, which demands the national spirit come true via national massacre. It is not (and certainly does not have to be!) a death trap. Escaping from it is not so difficult—it just needs a little patience and necessary distance. Because maybe death itself is not the problem, as much as it is the way of understanding it. There must be a point in the thought process when recognizing the importance of the idea of communication between living and dead does not make a Golden Calf for acts of hysterical idolatry out of it.

Thus, in summary, here is one argument “against” and one argument “in favor” of this Polish theatrum of death. “Against”: it is impossible to discern the advantages in the use, abuse, and appropriation of death for martyrological-national (and in fact, pseudo-patriotic) performances and similar rhetoric. Such an understanding of it traps Polish thinking in a provincial gesture of mindless repetition. It also leads to a grotesque pride of dubious distinction. Understood as such, death becomes a tribal totem that keeps the community in a state of permanent fixation on the point of its own suffering. This approach turns out to be a melancholic (in the Freudian sense) refusal to end mourning and culminates in a disposition that could be called mental necrophilia.

“In favor”: the memory of death, namely, the memory of our dead, of “our dear buried” (all the dead, too, even those who are ideologically “inconvenient”) is a clear gesture of anchoring the older rather than the current layers of culture in the contemporary community. In this sense, it is a gesture of enrichment.

It might be an initial attempt to reject the thoughtless and idle modern decree on the ideological primacy of the future. This attitude is often reproduced in a degenerate form. It is also an attempt to plant the national community in the myth. Understood as such, the idea of

“eternal forefathers” can be a solid means of bing the community together. In this situation, the rite of “forefathers,” the rite of summoning the spirits of the dead brought to the level of art and realizing itself in great theatrical (and film) fiction, ceases to be folk Ramot. Sometimes it becomes a spiritually harrowing experience, more than proof of the reality of such metaphysical penetration.

Watching a digitalized version of the film *Somersault* by Konwicki,<sup>11</sup> one recalls the leather clad Zbigniew Cybulski jumping out of the train and making his way through the bushes before appearing in a small Polish town, a provincial cosmos, strange, peculiar (“these people are dead, ghosts only,” he says), in which the dead mingle with the living. He recalls the war of the not too distant past. He comes, he says, after his own death. The film is unusual, hypnotic, with some mystery hidden in the middle. At first it looks like a little thanatic version of *Forefathers’ Eve*, although towards the end—with a dancing robot in a bar—it seems like a slightly hallucinatory version of *The Wedding* by Wyspiański.<sup>12</sup> The movie is so Polish, with its strong idiomatic stigma. War, spirits, ghosts, death. Yes, I am home, I am home. Form subjects death to the Polish art of distillation. So I dive into the past, I experience the suffering of a hero, I visit the Polish cemetery, but I do not go in pursuit of a deadly fever. The memory of the recent war does not crush me, but rather opens up the more than transient topicalities. The Polish theater of death also has its cathartic dimension. Let Rymkiewicz dream about massacres and corpses; let others sharpen the bayonet.

<sup>11</sup> Tadeusz Konwicki, *Somersault* (1965).

<sup>12</sup> Stanisław Wyspiański (1869–1907) was a Polish playwright, painter, and poet. A patriotic writer, he created a series of symbolic, national dramas within the artistic philosophy of the Young Poland Movement. Wyspiański was one of the most outstanding and multifaceted artists of his time in Poland under the foreign partitions. He joined the trends of modernism with themes of the Polish folk tradition and Romantic history. Unofficially, he came to be known as the Fourth Polish Bard (in addition to the earlier Three Bards: Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki, and Zygmunt Krasiński).



PART III

# **PiS'S POLITICS OF NORMALITY**



## THE QUEST FOR THE “NORMAL” FAMILY

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URSZULA CHOWANIEC

Politics is increasingly a public oratory game aimed at blurring, confusing and manipulating the meaning of words and concepts in order to gain popularity, rather than to communicate any kind of truth. For literary and cultural theorists, politics feels like a constant voyage through Arthur Schopenhauer's manual of rhetoric.

In contemporary politics, the surprising element in these games is that despite the—virtual and real—all-pervasive media presence and the unprecedented level of social education in the Western world, it seems as easy as ever to lie to the public. One example of such a blunt and open, yet blindly accepted, lie was information during the Brexit campaign about how much the UK spends on the EU on a weekly basis and the promise that this money would be spent on the NHS (which was denied on the morning after the referendum in June 2016 by Nigel Farage, the leader of the Brexit movement).

There are more sophisticated and more difficult to counteract lies in political rhetoric: one example is the main theme of this article, namely the manipulation of the concept of gender by right-wing, predominantly PiS, politicians in Poland. Such manipulation has helped in establishing traditional, family-orientated politics, based on another blurred concept of normality. Gender, connected to LGBTIQ movements, has been set up as opposed to “normal” human beings and constructed as a social threat.

Here I sketch the contemporary Polish political debate related to broadly understood “body politics,” giving special attention to language—manipulating, disturbing, sometimes changing completely—and shamelessly utilizing concepts to win arguments. Two phenomena are at the core of this article: the debate on abortion, which appeared

in March 2016 with the conservative proposition to restrict the already restrictive anti-abortion law, and the debate on gender and its connection to family politics and sexual education.

**MONSTROUS GENDER:  
“FEMINIST” LANGUAGE VERSUS IDEOLOGICAL MANIPULATION**

One could perhaps ask how is it possible that gender (as a concept, as a phenomenon, or its existence) can be denied, negated, or rejected? I am not only referring to the recent debate between the Polish Catholic Church and the political response to its reflections on gender (mainly in 2013 and 2014)<sup>1</sup>, but also to the general audience, often educated people who are confused about the very notion.

So, why is it like this? Gender as an idea—however popular in the scientific and academic context—is difficult to capture in everyday usage: gender is there. Gender is obtained, inscribed, practiced, exercised but not talked about. The discussion on gender tends to be masqueraded by other terms, such as obligation, duty, masculinity, parenting, mother, womanhood, and many other things. This two-fold semantic and pragmatic dimension of gender causes controversies not only in the Polish context but generally. In the Polish case, as it is a case in many other languages (Russian, Czech, Spanish etc.), gender as a word has never been translated and functions in the English form (in Polish not even transliterated), which only adds to its vagueness in common use. I argue that gender in many contemporary languages and cultures functions in its double dimension: as an “obvious” academic concept (where the question of its existence is incontestable); and in its “opaque” dimension—it appears to be absent from the broader educational spheres (schools, teachers’ training, developing professional skills workshops), and as such it continues to be obscure and subject to political manipulation.

<sup>1</sup> The recent book by Maciej Duda exemplifies and describes well the whole phenomenon of the language manipulation in the church, politics, and sometime academic debates. Maciej Duda, *Dogmat płci. Polska wojna z gender* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Katedra, 2016).

The "incontestable" character of gender is a consequence of the scholarship of particular disciplines, namely feminist studies, then gender studies, and LGBTQ studies. In Poland, gender as term appeared in the 1990s, primarily in literary studies, but also in political and social studies.<sup>2</sup> In recent years, there have appeared many publications summarizing the last two decades of the presence of feminist thought in the Polish Academy, such as the *Encyclopedia of Gender* (*Encyclopedia gender: płć w kulturze*, 2014).<sup>3</sup> Yet, gender as a concept with its complicated semantic field as well as particular character in its usage, causes many misunderstandings, despite scholarship devoted to its elaborations (starting from the classic texts such as those by Joan Scott, Judith Butler, and Toril Moi) to Polish publications (Nasiłowska, Iwasiów).<sup>4</sup>

Now, let us review the many confusions in Polish public discourse in 2013–14, which were also present since the autumn 2015 election when PiS again became the major political player in Polish politics.

#### THE CATALOGUE OF MISUNDERSTANDINGS

Gender is a concept "deeply destructive" to "the person, inter-human relations and all social life," we read in the pastoral letter by Polish bishops attacking the "ideology of gender," which was recited in all churches on December 29, 2013. In their letter, the bishops said the "ideology of gender" was "strongly rooted in Marxism and neo-

<sup>2</sup> One of the chief publications was a huge collection of essays summarizing the previous decade on gender scholarship published in 2001: German Ritz, Magdalena Hornung, Jędrzejczak Marcin, and Tadeusz Korsak, *Ciało, płć, literatura: prace ofiarowane Profesorowi Germanowi Ritzowi* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Wiedza Powszechna, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Rudaś, Grodzka, Monika et al., *Encyclopedia gender. Płć w kulturze* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Czarna Owca, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> I refer here to the following texts: Joan Scott Wallach, *Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis* (Washington: American Historical Association, 1986) 46–61; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990); Toril Moi, *What is a Woman? and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), and the first Polish elaborations on gender, like Anna Nasiłowska, *Ciało I tekst. Feminizm w literaturoznawstwie*. (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich, 2001). This book collected many essays that initiated the debate on feminism and gender within the magazine *Teksty Drugie* in 1993 and 1995). See also Inga Iwasiów, *Geder dla średniozaawansowanych* (Warszawa: W.A.B., 2004).

Marxism” and had been promoted in Poland “for several months” by “vocal circles with considerable financial means” who wanted to “experiment on children.” The letter also states that “God created men and women—with the great and indispensable gift that, in body and spirit, they should be men for women and women for men, assigned to married life.” And further, “It must therefore arouse the greatest concern that an attempt is now being made to redefine marriage and family, especially by supporters of this ideology of gender.”

The letter caused great confusion. Many have thought the controversy was being stoked by simple misunderstandings. For example, Piotr Mucharski, chief editor of the Kraków-based Catholic weekly, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, said that “Gender Studies have been taught at Polish universities for years and no one until now has questioned this.”<sup>5</sup> Then the Polish government’s Equal Rights Plenipotentiary, Agnieszka Kozłowska-Rajewicz, said that no programs spreading anti-family material existed in Polish schools and accused the bishops of inventing the term “gender ideology” as an “imagined enemy.” Meanwhile, a group of Warsaw-based professors said the Church’s new campaign risked “endangering freedom of research,” and another group wrote to the Pope, complaining that blaming gender studies as a source of family crisis was simply a “witch hunt.”

A heated public debate started, in which feminist and gender circles tended to take the accusation as a joke, while the Church and conservative circles (teachers, activists, some MPs) took the issue very seriously and—using the above mentioned language (gender ideology, Marxist connections, a destructive idea, genderism against the family etc.)—started a campaign in the media and organized protests, talks, and lectures.

Several prominent churchmen also questioned the bishops’ move. While reporting on the debate, the Catholic weekly, *Our Sunday Visitor* stressed that Catholic experts tended to be confused by the whole event: “A Jesuit editor, Father Jacek Prusak, said the pastoral letter appeared to have ‘distorted relations between religion and science,’ while a leading Dominican, Father Maciej Zięba, questioned

<sup>5</sup> See Jonathan Luxmoore, “Polish Church Declares War on Gender Ideology,” *Our Sunday Visitor Newsweekly*, January 29, 2014.

the wisdom of denouncing 'gender' when most Poles had never heard the term."<sup>6</sup>

The story of this "gender trouble" in the Polish Church goes back to 2012; at least this was suggested by the Polish Church's Catholic Information Agency, KAI, in January 2014, stating that the Catholic Church worldwide had "unanimously rejected the ideology of gender" after being warned about it by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI in a December 2012 Christmas address to the Roman Curia.<sup>7</sup> In the address, the pope described gender theory as a "new philosophy of sexuality," which maintained: "sex is no longer a given element of nature" but "a social role we choose for ourselves." The pope added that the "profound falsehood" of the theory risked an "anthropological revolution," which would threaten human dignity by undermining the family and leading people to "deny their nature."<sup>8</sup> Following that speech, the individual Polish bishops began denouncing "gender" in mid-2013.

*Our Sunday Visitor's* report on the Church's moves: "In October [2013], the head of the Church's Catholic Education Commission, Bishop Marek Mendyk of Legnica, said he had written to the Education Ministry, demanding gender be removed from schools. In November, Bishop Kazimierz Ryczan of Kielce wrote to Polish parliament members, urging them to 'defend the homeland against totalitarian genderism,' while Archbishop Marek Jędraszewski of Łódź warned that 'gender' would bring the 'denial of God' and 'death of civilization.'"<sup>9</sup>

Finally, gender as an enemy appeared in the bishops' post-Christmas pastoral letter, where it was stated that the "ideology of gender" encouraged people to "decide whether they are men or women" and "set up a new type of family," typically based on homosexual unions. Bishops added that the ideology was being introduced to Poland "without the knowledge of society or the consent of Poles," under the guise of re-

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

sisting domestic violence and promoting equal rights, and threatened “not just the family, but also our homeland and all humanity.”<sup>10</sup>

Let us have a closer look at the mechanism of manipulation in the pastoral letter. In the pastoral letter from December 29, 2013, we read that “the [ideology of gender, genderism] . . . adopts rules completely contrary to reality and an integral understanding of human nature. It claims that biological sex has no social importance, that it’s all about cultural sex, which one can freely shape and define, regardless of biological conditions.”<sup>11</sup>

The most important elements of the letter were, of course, the rhetorical usage of the word ideology and the suffix -ism for gender. This was used to set up immediate skepticism if not aversion to the phenomenon, before it was actually defined. Later on, the very definition as such does not really matter. But here the manipulation goes further: the definition contradicts any definition of gender taken from any dictionary.

Since January 2014, many Polish Catholics have been confused about just what is under attack in this debate. Some media commentators believe the Church chose to highlight gender to divert public discussion away from sexual abuse by priests, which reached the headlines in Poland in early 2013. It was also suggested that gender has now been widened (in its rhetorically vague use) to cover threats to social and moral issues, from homosexuality to abortion (see the opinion of the editor of *Tygodnik Powszechny*, Piotr Mucharski).<sup>12</sup> Church representatives have denied this, but many Catholics remain at a loss to explain how the storm over “gender” suddenly erupted.

Despite the surprise of many within Catholic circles, the Church pressed on with its campaign in January 2014. Addressing parliamentarians on January 23, a lecturer from Kraków’s John Paul II Papal University, Father Dariusz Oko, said “gender ideology” was being “pushed by atheists” and “threatened civilization.” Father Oko, being a real “anti-genderist” campaigner, stated: “Just as the Church criti-

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, the entry: “Bishops Attack Dangerous ‘Gender’ Ideology and Re-definition of Marriage. And from Where Else? Polonia Semper Catholica.” *RORATE CAELI Blog*, February 11, 2014, accessed December 2, 2017, <http://rorate-caeli.blogspot.com/2014/02/bishops-attack-dangerous-gender.html>.

<sup>12</sup> See Jonathan Luxmoore, “Polish Church Declares War on Gender Ideology.”



cized Marxist and Nazi ideology, and was persecuted for it, so now it is criticizing gender ideology.”<sup>13</sup>

This is echoed in social life, with Polish newspapers reporting that many parents were calling for a ban on “gender” in schools. In January, a group of teachers backed the Church in a hard-hitting statement, claiming “so-called Gender Studies” should be banned from educational institutions. Lena Kolarska-Bobińska, then higher education minister, rejected this and said Polish colleges would be denied European Union funding if they failed to comply with equality norms, which were enshrined in the national constitution. Professor Małgorzata Fuszara scorned the bishops’ “false linking” of gender with Marxism and accused them of touching off “a spirit of moral panic” from which “incompetent people are seeking political capital.” The editor of *Tygodnik Powszechny* said that “perhaps the academics teaching gender had made a mistake in failing to explain it to wider society” and continued that this may be the reason why many people are now saying that gender is an anti-religious, atheist ideology.<sup>14</sup> This is a very valid point in the dispute and shows how unanticipated it is when academic jargon enters everyday language and how problematic the absence of clear and short definitions is.

#### **GENDER DISCUSSED: HATE SPEECH AND VIOLENCE—SOME EXAMPLES**

Nevertheless, many Polish public figures and politicians use the word gender and have constructed a new social monster—gender ideology. Here, I would like to present two examples of the consequence of the debate: the first—how the gender debate became a source of social violence, and the second—a misuse of the language of feminist research on sexuality (the “third sex” term) by a PiS politician, namely the spokesman for the Polish government.

An interesting example of anti-gender rhetoric was the explanation offered by Elżbieta Witek, the spokeswoman for the government, in

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

2013.<sup>15</sup> In a short interview she accused “gender of promoting the ideology of gender” (without seemingly being aware that she was using a tautology), she called gender “the third sex,” and connected it with the sexualization of children and sex education in schools, through which parents would lose control over their children, and during which children would lose identification with their biological genders.

This example shows how populist, vague, and inconsistent such political interventions can be, aimed at re-establishing certain positions without any attempt of understanding the concept itself. The discourse is represented by politicians in sentences that are grammatically correct but logically inconsistent. The only function of this futile definition is phatic: to create a feeling of danger and uncertainty, or to denote the disturbance of some safe and known status quo (normality).

#### ROOTS OF MISUNDERSTANDING

Why have so few academics who announced the devilish character of gender (like Paweł Bortkiewicz) or politicians (Elżbieta Witek) taken such little effort to understand “gender” as a concept? I am convinced that the roots of this intentional misunderstanding of what gender is are the following: first, one source of misunderstanding is associating gender with an old “enemy,” in this case, setting it against the “conservative normality,” namely associating gender with feminism, or broadly speaking, women who want to revolt against the traditional order. In the 1980s, Joan Scott noted that gender was used as a synonym for women. She wrote: “In its simplest recent usage, ‘gender’ is a synonym for ‘women.’ Any number of books and articles whose subject is women’s history have in the past few years substituted ‘gender’ for ‘women’ in their titles. In some cases, this usage, though vaguely referring to certain analytic concepts, is actually about the political acceptability of the field. In these instances, the use of ‘gender’ is meant to denote scholarly seriousness of ‘gender,’ which has a more neutral and objective sound than ‘women’ . . . . This use of

<sup>15</sup> Interview by the TV in Lublin: POLSKA. Ideologia gender a fundusze unijne. Published on the 11 December, 2013. See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YatQ5mfgmos> (accessed: 12.02. 2017).

‘gender’ is one facet of what might be called the quest of feminist scholarship for academic legitimacy in the 1980s.”<sup>16</sup>

Gender then was meant to be more objective than Women’s Studies, which tended to be treated as biased, unprofessional, and ideological. Nevertheless gender as a concept has survived being linked with “feminism” and “women” as the so-called “other” sex, and as such it has become misunderstood in the Church’s reading, becoming a synonym of all that is counter to the heteronormative order, which provokes a strong inclination against feminist standpoints.

### SEXUALIZATION OF CHILDREN

The Polish discussion about gender and sexual education is also highly emotional. “It is not normal!” shout PiS politicians, referring to a school curriculum that includes classes on sexuality, since, they argue, the family should give children knowledge about this sphere of life. Minister of Education Anna Zalewska announces elusively that she “will not let ‘sex educators’ into schools.”<sup>17</sup> Reasonable voices are often drowned out, like those such as Joanna Kluzik-Rostkowska’s, the ex-minister of education, who said: “I believe that sex education allows children to be able to avoid many dangers. Of course, it is that information or knowledge about sexuality and the various situations that are associated with it, which should be adapted to the age of the child.”<sup>18</sup>

Any rational discussion in the public sphere appears to have been rejected by the new government, which seems to want to take back Poland to some mythical traditional order. Since the beginning of 2016, we have heard emotionally charged accusations against: sex education, gender ideology, and feminism as national dangers. Suddenly, alongside gender as an enemy of normality, sexual education became another danger to the family, which is understood in conser-

<sup>16</sup> Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” 1056.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, “W Polityce.pl,” accessed February 2, 2017, <http://wpolityce.pl/spoleczenstwo/273677-anna-zalewska-szefowa-men-we-wsieci-nie-wpuszcze-seks-edukatorow-do-szkol-trzeba-szanowac-intymnosc-mlodych-ludzi>.

<sup>18</sup> See *Na Temat Blog*, accessed February 1, 2017, <http://natemat.pl/163917,seksedukatorzy-beda-mieli-zakaz-wstępu-do-szkol-joanna-kluzik-rostkowska-to-jest-mikro-zamach-na-autonomie-szkol>.

vative categories and set as the only norm. Anything that is not that family (heterosexual, with children) is constructed as a threat to society. This threat is moreover created as aimed against children (“our children,” and the inclusive “our” plays an important rhetorical role here). And all this is juxtaposed to purity, respect for the family, and restraint. The very structure of the phrase, “our children” is, in fact, an ideological appropriation of children, which is constructed by imposing a false definition with apocalyptic consequences, a strategy of intimidation aiming simply at the discrediting of “the enemy.”

An honest discussion concerning body politics in Poland seems to be taboo, whether it is about abortion, or gender, or in-vitro fertilization. All are locked in hermetic spheres of ideological presumptions, where no social consequences or actual facts based on research can be trusted. The omnipresence of mistrust, suspicion, and the feeling of conspiracy is surprisingly strong, and what seems to be the strongest concept within those discourses is the notion of normality, a conservative and, in many cases, religiously based presumption that once upon a time there was a mythical society free from problems: these kinds of problems. It is the least plausible concept of all, but it works rhetorically.

#### **ABORTION: A TEST OF DEMOCRACY**

“To support a total ban on abortion is crazy. But to give full rights to abortion to women is also a mistake,” I read on Facebook. It is a woman who writes it, a thinking, intellectual woman. As October 2016 began, my Facebook wall, like the wall of “Dziewuchy Dziewuchom” (Girls for girls), a women’s activist group, is full of initiatives opposing the parliamentary debate on the restrictive abortion law. So, why is it crazy to allow abortion? Will women use it as a contraceptive? I ask these questions provocatively, aware of all the arguments that are used by pro-life advocates who construct women as a promiscuous and irresponsible. As this text was being written, the protests, so-called “black protests” (*czarne protesty*), were being organized all over Poland. When supporting the existing, restrictive anti-abortion law in Poland becomes an act of liberal and progressive

politics—because we risk an even worse one—it is only fair to say that that all Polish citizens (men and women) have been trapped in a political game by those who do not want to hear, do not want to discuss, do not want to know, but are convinced of their so-called “pro-life” virtue and power.

The law proposed in the parliamentary debate in early April 2014 was a real shock: the present abortion law from 1993 does not foresee the possibility of terminating abortion in any case apart from in a threat to the mother’s life and psychological well-being (for example, in case the pregnancy is a result of an illegal act) or an evidently deformed fetus. The new anti-abortion law scratches all these exceptions, which fully criminalizes abortion in fact. April 2016 is an important month in the history of body politics in Poland: PiS finally introduced its policy (partly responsible for its success in elections) to support Polish families with more than one child, each family getting five hundred zlotys a month for each child (starting from the second). This pro-family policy was accompanied by the proposition to tighten the abortion law, which already made Poland’s the most restrictive anti-abortion law in Europe. Polish women began to coordinate quickly. The Facebook initiative “Girls for Girls” became the most important platform for passing on information. Nevertheless, these thousands of voices did not stop the proposition from moving forward legally. Many Polish women even went on strike to express their protest against the law.

Any anti-abortion law assumes that the first instinct of a woman is not to protect unborn life, but to get rid of it. Nobody seems to hear or believe the voices that say that abortion is always the ultimate choice. Fighting for a revision of the existing 1993 abortion law requires faith that someone in parliament and the government will be as brave, intelligent, and responsible as recently deceased Simone Veil was in the French Government in 1974, when she fought for the liberalization of a law that was almost identical to the current Polish anti-abortion law. During her final speech, she was insulted and abused, but the law was successfully introduced. She famously said something which should be remembered by everybody who wants to take part in debate on abortion: “First, I would like to share a woman’s conviction, I apologize to it in front of an assembly made almost

exclusively by men: no woman ever resorted to abortion with pleasure, you just have to hear the women, it is always a tragedy, it will always be a tragedy.”<sup>19</sup>

Body politics in Poland under PiS has become a disturbing space of chauvinistic discourse, shaming strategies, and the diminishing and ignoring of women. Contemporary body politics shows that Polish culture still bears strong features of patriarchy; women should be praised and work hard but in which the decisive voice should be given to solutions that support traditional gender roles and male culture. And this had nothing to do with the goals of real men, among whom there are many supporters of truly feminist and progressive values.

In a 2009 speech in which she assessed twenty-five years of Polish democracy, Maria Janion expressed her disappointment in applying equality policies, the anti-abortion law, and the relatively small presence of women in public life. She summarized this by saying that Polish democracy appeared to be a male democracy. The “male” character of Polish democracy should not be read as an allegation against men, but as an attempt to sustain values that are oppressive to women.<sup>20</sup>

The contemporary debate on gender, the invention of genderism, and gender ideology as a new form of witch hunting is clearly another sign of the conservative and “masculine” character of Polish democracy, and it needs to be stressed that this masculine character may be highly oppressive for all sexes and genders. At the height of the anti-gender “war,” a letter was sent to the Pope. It was a letter signed by, among others, Professor Magdalena Środa, and it called on the Pope to stop the false and unreasonable usage of gender by Polish Catholic Church; it was painfully unsuccessful. The open answer seemed to convey the same assumption: there is gender ideology, genderism, gender lobbies and it is dangerous. There is no doubt that this is a rhetorical move: Catholic circles are fully aware of the utility of gender as concept to study and describe social contexts, and it is not against the doctrine as such (see *Supplement*, “Gender: fakty i mity”/Gender: facts and myths of

<sup>19</sup> See the complete speech, accessed December 21, 2016, <http://www2.assemblee-nationale.fr/14/evenements/2015/anniversaire-loi-veil>.

<sup>20</sup> M. Janion, *Bohater spisek, śmierć. Wykłady żydowskie* (Warszawa: Virtualo, 2009). See my Introduction to Urszula Chowaniec et al., *Women's Voices and Feminism in Polish Cultural Memory* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2012).

*Tygodnik Powszechny*). In this supplement from December 2013, Sławomira Walczewska, a famous Polish feminist and activist, said: "Let's stop fighting the word. Indeed, it might be a linguistic trick to stop the debate. Avoid the word gender. Once we exchange 'gender' with a cultural role, it will be easier to swallow. But will it be enough? Or is the need of the enemy stronger?" The last two questions still remained unanswered, or perhaps they are simply rhetorical.

## LGBTQ AND POLISH PATRIARCHY

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TOMASZ BASIUK

PiS (Law and Justice) is engaged in a potentially perilous gamble by flirting with the extreme nationalistic right and with fundamentalist Catholics. It has successfully dragged the episcopate into this arrangement because the Church stands to profit materially and symbolically from being politically aligned with the ruling party. In this context, women's procreative rights are in danger of being further curtailed and there will be little to no room is left for LGBT rights. Instead, homophobia is on the rise.

Developments since PiS came to power in late 2015 indicate that little or no progress can be expected from the government on women's and LGBT rights. It is even likely that existing rights will be curbed should PiS yield to pressure from lay and clerical Catholic fundamentalists and from right-wing nationalists, who it is not so coyly courting.

This is hardly surprising given the previous PiS-led government of 2005–7 dissolved the office for gender equality. A decade later, after being restored by PO (Civic Platform) the post is filled by conservative appointees. And although PiS has moved to redistribute wealth with its signature 500+ program, which dispenses cash to families with more than one child in the hope of boosting the declining birth-rate, this will likely take a number of women off the job market.

The left's failure to win any seats in parliament in the 2015 election exacerbates widespread insensitivity to gender and LGBT issues. Where the previous parliament included the seasoned women's rights activist Wanda Nowicka, the transgender activist Anna Grodzka, and the gay activist Robert Biedroń, there seems to be no comparable



figure among the current MPs. Paweł Rabiej, the co-founder of *Nowoczesna* who came out as gay in 2016, does not have a seat.

PiS has a bigger right-wing electorate than does the more centrist PO, which was in power between 2007 and 2015. PiS is therefore more likely than PO was to be pressured by the Catholic church, especially by its dominant fundamentalist wing, to further restrict access to abortion or to make teaching about homosexuality illegal. PiS owes its electoral victory, in part, to the support of the media conglomerate *Radio Maryja* (Radio of the Blessed Mary), the mouthpiece of ultra-conservative Catholicism in Poland, as well as a number of bishops and countless parish priests. It has been returning the favor by awarding state funds to *Radio Maryja*. PiS has also exempted the Catholic Church from new restrictions on the trade of agricultural land, of which the Church is the biggest single owner. But now ideological concessions pertaining to sexuality and gender are expected by Catholic fundamentalists.

Most Poles are conservative in their outlook on gender and sexuality. One reason for lingering conservatism is that Poland was isolated from the West in the formative decades of the 1960s and the 1970s. But the crucial consideration is that more than 90 percent of Poles are nominally Catholic. Even the non-observant are likely to pay lip service to the Church's teaching on gender roles and sexual mores, whether or not they follow these lessons. Religion plays a deeply embedded symbolic function in most people's lives. Such ritualistic observance is discursively linked to Polish national identity, resulting in a heterosexual, male-centered ideal of ethno-religious purity. PiS is actively promoting this traditionalist nationalism linked to religiosity, by posturing as the rightful heir to a legacy encompassing Poland's century-long struggle to regain independence and the subsequent interwar period, when the conflation of Catholicism and nationalism was pronounced and fed xenophobia and especially anti-Semitism. After the Second World War, nationalism was again invoked by the communist party to legitimize its rule, and by the Catholic Church to bolster its oppositional stance to communism.

Since 1989, Catholic bishops have repeatedly influenced legislation on matters of gender and sexuality. In 1997, they caused an entire list of causes of illegal discrimination to be struck from a draft of the Con-

stitution because the list included sexual identity. Discrimination due to sexual identity is mentioned only in the Polish labor code, because it was made a prerequisite for EU accession in 2004. As early as 1993, parliament abided by the church's wish, imposing a nearly complete ban on abortion while ignoring the popular demand for a referendum on the issue. A 1994 liberalization was vetoed by President Lech Wałęsa, and the Polish People's Party (PSL) switched sides to prevent it from being overridden. A 1996 liberalization was overruled by the Constitutional Tribunal, with Andrzej Zoll presiding, in a decision which extended the right to life to the fetus. A 2007 attempt to enshrine that right in the Constitution faltered. The 1993 regulation thus remains and is known as the "abortion compromise." While the law allows for exceptions in the event of rape, serious deformation of the fetus, or a threat to the mother's life or health, access is made difficult by the physicians' right to refuse treatment for reasons of conscience.

As of 2016, Catholic fundamentalists are challenging the abortion compromise of 1993. A massive grass-roots campaign to demand a complete ban emerged after the election of 2015, supported by the more conservative PiS officials. This puts PiS in a difficult spot because to further restrict access to abortion risks alienating its more moderate electorate at a time when other controversial policies are sparking protest. Unexpectedly, the bishops came to PiS leader Jarosław Kaczyński's rescue by withholding judgment, even though a complete ban has been their own position. Kaczyński reciprocated by making religious education count toward the high school graduation record, something the bishops have also wanted. Still, the anti-abortion campaigners have not desisted, and PiS appears to have caved in to their demand by voting to send their bill to a parliamentary commission while scrapping the opposite proposal to make abortion freely available. But the now real possibility that abortion will be banned except when the mother's life is endangered by the pregnancy is prompting mass protest, known as the Black Protest, as it did on October 3, 2016 (Black Monday), when thousands of women and men marched in hundreds of locations to successfully demand that the bill be dropped. Although PiS is probably going to drag its feet on such a politically volatile piece of legislation, the ultimate result will likely depend on power games on the right and even within PiS.

The mutual gestures between the episcopate and the political ruler, amounting to a rather public negotiation, reveal not just the entanglement of the Church and state, which has been long apparent; it also reveals the somewhat precarious positions, which both sides occupy vis-à-vis their mostly right-wing constituencies. The bishops are caught between their pragmatic ambition to influence the government on the one hand, and a grass-roots fundamentalism overlapping with xenophobic nationalism on the other. They must reckon with vociferous extremists among their own ranks so as to maintain the semblance of a unified ideological front, which is what gives the bishops their clout. Caught between these imperatives, they seem unable to adequately censor such recent right-wing excesses as a nationalistic rally held by a paramilitary militia in a Catholic cathedral in Białystok in eastern Poland in 2016, a verbal and physical assault on a Russian Orthodox (and implicitly Ukrainian) religious ceremony in Przemyśl in southeastern Poland perpetrated by Poles identifying as Catholic also in 2016, or the virulent portrayal of Pope Francis as a madcap lefty by Catholic commentators. Predictably, the Church has focused on the Pope's remarks about the perilous "ideology of gender" during his 2016 visit to Poland as confirming its own conservative outlook. His anti-xenophobic message on asylum seekers has been ignored.

PiS, too, is maneuvering in the narrow political space defined by right-wing radicalism as illustrated by the anti-abortionists' campaign, and by gestures embracing openly xenophobic nationalists. An example of the latter is President Andrzej Duda's curious congratulatory letter to rallying nationalists, who marched in Warsaw with lighted torches in hand on Independence Day 2015.<sup>1</sup> Because this ex-

<sup>1</sup> In appealing to the marchers' patriotism, the President's letter seemed intended to prevent an outbreak of violence such as the one that had occurred the previous year. The letter reads in part (in my translation): "I am exceedingly glad that citizens of our free Republic, especially the young people, participate more and more eagerly in official patriotic events. I thank all those who on this day proudly celebrate the memory of our national heroes. I thank all those who contribute to the forging of an identity and of cordial relations, which connect the entire Polish community. Let today's Independence March express our loyalty to our most cherished national traditions, state symbols and the white-and-red of our flag. Let it strengthen our certainty that we are one, strong, creative and wise nation. Let it deepen our faith in our own capacities and our hope for a fortuitous future. I wish and I count on it being a beautiful celebration of young, zealous

tremist electorate demands historical revisionism, Duda in the 2015 presidential contest and other PiS officials more recently have denied that Poles were perpetrators of wartime pogroms like the one in Jedwabne in 1941. Xenophobic nationalism targets both refugees and a range of perceived domestic enemies, including gay activists and other “genderists,” the few remaining or returning Jews, the small German and Ukrainian minorities, most intellectuals, and practically anyone on the left.

It is the openly xenophobic rhetoric that most clearly separates PiS and PO, and that has made the greatest difference to women’s rights and to the vulnerable LGBT community so far. Admittedly, the PO-led governments between 2007 and 2015 failed to ease the abortion ban or to recognize same-sex unions, or to even attempt to tackle these issues. PO restricted access to in vitro fertilization to (heterosexual) couples, declined to register hate crimes including those motivated by homophobia, and made only a half-hearted attempt to adopt a transgender rights bill, which is much needed because transitioning in Poland requires a labyrinthine court procedure that includes suing one’s parents. (The bill was vetoed by the newly incumbent President Duda.) PO’s poor record even motivated the gay activist and Warsaw alderman Krystian Legierski to support PiS rather than PO in the 2015 elections.

But if PO’s homophobia lies in its omissions, PiS has long made it a component of its political identity. The only occasions when the Warsaw gay pride, called Equality Parade, was banned, occurred in 2004 and 2005, during the late Lech Kaczyński’s term as mayor. The subsequent PiS-led government of 2005–7 included the head of LPR [the League of Polish Families] Mirosław Orzechowski, who served as deputy minister of education. In this role, he called for the firing of

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Polish hearts.” The original wording of the letter is found on the President’s official website, where it has been pasted from an online news source, as seen from an accidentally copied addition: <http://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wypowiedzi-prezydenta-rp/inne/art,61,list-prezydenta-do-organizatorow-i-uczestnikow-marszu-niepodleglosci-w-warszawie.html>. A facsimile of the letter may be found on various news websites, e.g.: <http://niezalezna.pl/72824-co-napisal-prezydent-duda-do-uczestnikow-marszu-niepodleglosci-zobacz-tresc-listu>. A recording of the Presidential delegate reading the letter during the march is found on Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8nG-5oS7GA>.

homosexual teachers, stopped an EU-sponsored teacher's manual on diversity, including sexual diversity, and fired the responsible official. His fellow party member Wojciech Wierzejski demanded that all LGBT organizations be outlawed. None of this met with censure from PiS leader and prime minister Jarosław Kaczyński.

Current events seem like a replay of these excesses. Deputy prime minister Jarosław Gowin, who heads the small coalition party *Polska Razem*, began his current tenure as the cabinet minister in charge of university education and research by announcing that publications in lesbian and gay studies journals would not be recognized for funding purposes. A number of physical attacks on LGBT organizations' offices followed, including a broken window and attempted entry at a Warsaw office. Like Orzechowski and Wierzejski before him, Gowin is empowered in his homophobia (and in other xenophobic statements) by Kaczyński's tacit consent. He is hardly the only official openly engaging in hate speech.

It is sometimes difficult to tell if xenophobic PiS politicians mean everything they say or if they are merely toeing the party line by winking at the extreme right. During the 2005–7 PiS government, Kaczyński's stated strategy was to contain right-wing extremism by giving it a place at the table. Forced to assume political responsibility as a coalition partner, LPR soon ran out of steam and collapsed. But the overlapping forces of xenophobic nationalism and Catholic fundamentalism have not gone away. They are more organized and better prepared to wage a political struggle today than they were a decade ago. Nor do the most virulent of these agents form part of the present PiS-led government, while only some feel adequately represented in the parliament by the oppositional, and likely ephemeral, Kukiz'15 movement. This time around, nods of recognition addressed to right-wing extremism by the allegedly pragmatist Kaczyński and his political staff are more likely to fan its flame than to appease it. That is bound to be bad news for women's and LGBT rights.

**CONCLUSION**

In many ways, the strategies adopted by PiS are a perfected replay of its previous term in power in between 2005 and 2007. A flirtation with right-wing nationalists and Catholic fundamentalists is once again a hallmark of its position, apparently dictated by the hope of winning over these electorates. The approach, which entails drawing in the Church, risks making the ruling party cater to extremist constituents at the risk of losing more mainstream support. However, given the right wingers' growing influence, and fanned by xenophobia prompted in part by fear of immigration, it is no longer unthinkable that procreative rights may be limited even further, or that LGBT rights may be negatively affected, not only by continued denial of same-sex unions, but by some attempt at criminalization.

## AN IDENTITY RESET

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REMI ADEKOYA

He who controls the past controls the future, George Orwell once wrote. Poland's ruling party, PiS, is expending much time and effort on the (re)interpretation of Polish history partly as a natural consequence of the party's ideological leanings, but also because it is a vital component in a well thought out and audaciously grand long-term political strategy. This strategy involves systematically laying the groundwork for the entrenchment of a contemporary Polish identity in line with the vision of party leader, Jarosław Kaczyński, who nurses historical ambitions.

If successful, PiS will control the narrative around national identity for years to come, making it not just another party but the political custodian of Polish patriotism. Such a party will not be easy to dislodge from power. Moreover, it would enable PiS to shape wider societal attitudes and, as a consequence, the policies not just of this government, but of future ones to come. That would be some legacy.

### SHEDDING GUILT

The initial step in this project is the “rejuvenation and consolidation of the national community,”<sup>1</sup> which Kaczyński promised when PiS took power in 2015. To achieve this, Poles must first be disabused of the “pedagogy of shame that dominated Polish public life for the past

<sup>1</sup> Jarosław Kaczyński, “Przemówienie Jarosława Kaczyńskiego podczas debaty nad expose” (speech to the Polish parliament in Warsaw, November 18, 2015), *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, <http://pis.org.pl/aktualnosci/przemowienie-jaroslaw-a-kaczynskiego-podczas-debaty-nad-expose>.

twenty years.”<sup>2</sup> The way Kaczyński tells it, the liberal establishment, dominant in both media and academia, has done its best to imbibe in the Polish nation an undeserved sense of guilt, for instance, by blaming Poles for the 1941 Jedwabne pogrom during which hundreds of Jews were locked up in a barn and burned alive.

Meanwhile, according to Anna Zalewska, the education minister appointed by PiS, the Jedwabne pogrom “is a historical fact that has led to many misunderstandings and very biased opinions.” Historical accounts of what happened remain “controversial” and are “contested by various historians” she says.<sup>3</sup> When it comes to the 1946 Kielce pogrom, the deadliest post-World War Two attack on Polish Jews, the education minister blamed “anti-Semites” but seemed unwilling to admit those anti-Semites were Poles.<sup>4</sup>

A clear pattern emerges when PiS discusses the past. Historical events that could portray Poles in a negative light are described as “controversial” or “complicated,” discrepancies in the minutiae of historical accounts regarding these events are pounced upon and used to shed doubt on overall findings hitherto considered indisputable. It is suggested that reports of Poles committing atrocities against Jews during Germany’s World War Two occupation of Poland have been grossly exaggerated by foreign “anti-Polish” elements aided by unpatriotic Polish liberals. As a result of this sustained anti-Polish propaganda, “responsibility for the Holocaust has been internationalized with a special emphasis on Poles,” says Kaczyński.<sup>5</sup> This will be “re-sisted decisively,” he promises.<sup>6</sup>

It is in this context that the controversial 2018 law threatening prosecution for anyone who assigns even co-responsibility for the Holocaust to Poland should be interpreted. It was not anti-Semitism that

<sup>2</sup> Jarosław Kaczyński, interview by Henry Foy, *Financial Times*, last modified February 26, 2016, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/8238e15a-db46-11e5-a72f-1e7744c66818.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Anna Zalewska, interview by Monika Olejnik, *TVN24*, last modified July 13, 2016, <http://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-z-kraju,3/anna-zalewska-w-kropce-nad-i-o-jedwabnem-i-pogromie-kieleckim,660799.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Zalewska, interview by Monika Olejnik, *TVN24*.

<sup>5</sup> Jarosław Kaczyński, “Jarosław Kaczyński po expose Beaty Szydło: Czas tolerancji dla korupcji się skończył!” (speech, November 18, 2015), *WPolityce.pl*, accessed, September 10, 2016. <http://wpolityce.pl/polityka/272248-jaroslaw-kaczynski-trzeba-postawic-dwa-zasadnicze-pytania-sejmowa-debata-po-expose-premier-szydlo-relacja-na-zywo>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



motivated it, but the desire to symbolically affirm the moral purity and innocence of the Polish nation.

For Kaczyński, shedding any sense of guilt for what happened to Polish Jews during WWII is a crucial step towards forging an identity Poles can be proud of, an identity in which the Polish nation is not only guiltless; it is a morally superior collective. Poland is indeed the “Christ of nations” as poet Adam Mickiewicz put it, persecuted by an evil world envious of its superior morals. This convenient self-righteous narrative has a strong emotional appeal for many Poles, and, importantly, ample historical evidence to lend it credence: the eighteenth-century partitioning of Poland by foreign powers, German and Soviet occupation during World War Two, and half-a-century of Soviet-imposed communism, to mention a few obvious examples. According to Zalewska, PiS’s planned overhaul of Poland’s education system will ensure there is significantly more focus on Polish history “because when you know how to draw conclusions from your nation’s past, it is more difficult to manipulate you.”<sup>7</sup> No doubt teachers will be encouraged to present a “patriotic” version of Polish history. But why is this white washing of Poland’s past deemed so important by PiS?

### RESISTING DOMINATION

Kaczyński believes postcommunist Poland has been too obsequious in its dealings with the outside world, particularly with the powerful foreign interests who want to lord it over Poles. At the heart of Kaczyński’s project is resistance to perceived domination. He has accused the former government led by Prime Minister Donald Tusk of conducting Polish foreign policy “on bended knees” especially vis-à-vis powerful Germany. “Are we to agree to be a de-facto colony to be exploited? Some think that is all we can be, but I radically oppose such ideas. I also know that independence costs,” Kaczyński declared in a 2016 in-

<sup>7</sup> Anna Zalewska, interview by Aleksandra Pezda, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, last modified April 9, 2016, <http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/1,124059,19889350,minister-anna-zalewska-mickiewicz-da-szkole.html>.

interview.<sup>8</sup> Suffice to say, only a self-confident nation can muster the courage to resist exploitation by the powerful and only a people proud of their history will be ready to pay the inevitable “cost” of defending their independence. If one views Poland’s present-day status through Kaczyński’s eyes, his desire to create a more confident and assertive Polish identity becomes perfectly logical.

But why try to build a national identity around notions of moral superiority, and not, for instance, postcommunist Poland’s economic successes? First of all, because Kaczyński has built his political career on a scathing critique of virtually everything about Poland’s economic transformation. Secondly, while present-day Poland is much richer and better developed than it was when communism collapsed in 1989, it still lags far behind Western Europe economically.

Even crisis-stricken Greece, easily the poorest country in “old” Europe, still has a higher nominal GDP per capita than Poland, with the figures standing at \$18,077 and \$12,309 respectively, according to IMF 2016 figures.<sup>9</sup> When purchasing power parity (PPP) is taken into account, the two countries come out about even.<sup>10</sup> Thus, socioeconomic comparisons with Western European nations cannot possibly give Poles the plausible sense of superiority that every nationalism needs in order to flourish. Neither can PiS build national pride on the military strength of Poland the way Vladimir Putin does in Russia. The country does not have nuclear weapons or an army that is feared. Poland is also not a major exporter of culture like, for instance, the small Scandinavian nations whose music bands and noir crime stories are recognizable the world over, and, thus, an effective source of national pride.

Historically, Poles have always used Western Europe as a benchmark for measuring their country’s achievements, so pointing out Poland is richer and stronger than most other countries in the world is unlikely to resonate and inspire much national pride. Therefore, bereft of superior economic or military strength in comparison to

<sup>8</sup> Jarosław Kaczyński, interview by Jacek Karnowski and Michał Karnowski, *WSieci*, last modified April 18, 2016, <http://pis.org.pl/aktualnosci/jako-narod-mamy-poteczne-zasoby-poteczne-mozliwosci>.

<sup>9</sup> The International Monetary Fund, “World Economic Outlook, 2016: Report for Selected Countries and Subjects”, accessed June 12, 2017, <http://statisticstimes.com/economy/european-countries-by-gdp-per-capita.php>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Western European nations, it is perhaps quite logical that PiS would decide on a narrative asserting the inherent moral superiority of Poles as the most workable avenue to building a national consciousness inspiring nationalistic pride in being Polish.

### WEST NOT BEST

The second major step in this grand project is weaning Poles from their long-held emotional attachment to the West. Kaczyński has asserted “it is completely untrue what some say, that to achieve Western levels of development, we have to adopt their social models. That is hogwash.”<sup>11</sup> To discredit these Western European “social models”, PiS portrays the region in catastrophic terms. “There is a very deep crisis in Europe ... it is a serious crisis of European consciousness, a crisis of identity, which is coupled with the collapse of values and basic social institutions,” Kaczyński says.<sup>12</sup>

This “collapse of values and basic social institutions” makes it obvious that while Poles should aspire to the material success of Western Europe, they should steer clear of Western [liberal] values like secularism, equal rights for LGBTs, or a welcoming, “politically correct” attitude towards peoples of other cultures and races, particularly Muslims. In an interview this year, Kaczyński vowed, “while we are in power, we will never allow a cultural revolution”.<sup>13</sup>

Meanwhile, in the midst of the EU migrant crisis in 2015 when Poland was asked to accept some 7000 relocated asylum seekers, Kaczyński stated “there is a serious danger we will observe a process which looks more or less like this: first the number of foreigners rises rapidly, then they stop obeying our laws and our customs, then they aggressively impose their sensitivities and demands in various spheres of life. If someone says this is not true, just take a look around Eu-

<sup>11</sup> Jarosław Kaczyński, “Jarosław Kaczyński po expose Beaty Szydło” (speech, November 18, 2015), *wPolityce.pl*. September 10, 2016: <http://wpolityce.pl/polityka/272248-jaroslaw-kaczynski-trzeba-postawic-dwa-zasadnicze-pytania-sejmowa-debata-po-expose-premier-szydlo-relacja-na-zywo>.

<sup>12</sup> Jarosław Kaczyński, interview with *Gość Niedzielny*, last modified April 8, 2016, <http://pis.org.pl/aktualnosci/nie-chodzi-o-to-by-opozycja-przestala-byc-opozycja>.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

rope.” He then pointed to “churches treated like toilets in Italy,” parts of Sweden under “Sharia law,” and “constant troublemaking” in places like France and the UK.<sup>14</sup>

At the time Kaczyński gave his famous speech, a slim majority of Poles supported their country accepting relocated asylum seekers.<sup>15</sup> But a continued barrage of scare tactics from him and other PiS leaders in combination with some major incidents of home-grown Islamic terrorism in Europe, the long-lasting migrant crisis, and the rise of radical right-wing parties on the continent soon started having their effect on public opinion. By June 2016, 73 percent of Poles considered the influx of Middle Eastern refugees to Europe a “major threat” to their country, even more so than Vladimir Putin’s Russia, which started a war in neighboring Ukraine.<sup>16</sup> By April 2017, 74 percent of Poles were against Poland accepting any asylum-seekers from the Middle East and Africa.<sup>17</sup> And in a July 2017 poll whose results shocked many in the Polish establishment, 51.2 percent of Poles said Poland should refuse accepting any relocated Muslim migrants or refugees even if that meant Poland having to leave the European Union.<sup>18</sup>

PiS and their right-wing media supporters have convinced many Poles that “political correctness” and other Western liberal fancies have made the continent more vulnerable to Islamic terrorism, and now Brussels wants to force Poland to accept Muslim migrants (read: potential terrorists). Poles now accordingly view Western Europe

<sup>14</sup> Jarosław Kaczyński, “Mamy prawo bronić naszej suwerenności” (speech, Warsaw, September 16, 2015): Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, <http://pis.org.pl/aktualnosci/mamy-prawo-bronic-naszej-suwerennosci>.

<sup>15</sup> “Większość Polaków zgadza się na przyjęcie uchodźców” *TVN24*, last modified September 7, 2015, <https://fakty.tvn24.pl/fakty-ekstra,52/wiekszosc-polakow-chce-przyjac-uchodzcow-sondaz-millward-brown,575162.h>.

<sup>16</sup> Pew Research, “Europeans see ISIS, Climate Change as Most Serious Threats,” last modified June 13, 2016, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/06/13/europeans-see-isis-climate-change-as-most-serious-threats/>.

<sup>17</sup> *Gazeta Prawna*, “CBOS: 74 proc. Polaków przeciw przyjmowaniu uchodźców z Bliskiego Wschodu i Afryki,” last modified April 14, 2017, [http://www.gazetaprawna.pl/artykuly/1035264,74-proc-polakow-przeciw-przyjmowaniu-uchodzcow.html?utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=feed&utm\\_campaign=Feed%3AGazetaPrawna+%28GazetaPrawna.pl%29&utm\\_content=Google+UK](http://www.gazetaprawna.pl/artykuly/1035264,74-proc-polakow-przeciw-przyjmowaniu-uchodzcow.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3AGazetaPrawna+%28GazetaPrawna.pl%29&utm_content=Google+UK).

<sup>18</sup> *Gazeta.pl*, “Ponad połowa Polaków wołałaby wyjść z UE, niż przyjąć uchodźców. Podobnie z utratą funduszy,” last modified July 5, 2017, <http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/7,114871,22052829,ponad-polowa-polakow-wolalaby-wyjsc-z-ue-niz-przyjac-uchodzco>.

with a far more critical eye. They still admire its standards of living, but they seem to agree with PiS that Western ruling elites have adopted social models mired in multiculturalist utopian fantasies.

This is one of the reasons an avalanche of Western criticism of PiS's policies has not made a dent in their popularity. On the contrary, while the party won 37.5 percent of the vote in the October 2015 parliamentary elections, a February 2018 poll showed them with 43 percent support, over twice as much as their closest rival, Civic Platform (21 percent).<sup>19</sup>

A few years ago, no Polish government would have been able to get away with openly defying powerful "Western" institutions like the European Commission without losing popularity and credibility domestically. But Western Europe's soft power is on the decline in Poland, and criticism from the West no longer has the discrediting power it once did. This is one of the most significant socio-political developments in postcommunist Polish history, and it signals a new era in societal attitudes towards the West. It would appear that Kaczyński's attempt to engineer a reset in the Polish mindset is working, of course, not with all Poles naturally, but with enough of them to be able alter the political dynamics of the country. And so PiS is forging ahead with the establishment of a dominant vision of Polish identity broadly describable as socially conservative, proudly Catholic (not in a religious sense, but as an identity marker distinguishing Poles from Muslims), nationalistic, inward-looking, averse to self-criticism, filled with notions of moral superiority, and wary of foreigners, especially those from other civilizations and cultures.

### **NO IMMIGRANTS, NO PROBLEMS**

As the son of a Nigerian father and Polish mother who has spent half his life in Poland and has a strong emotional attachment to the country, PiS's exclusivist version of national identity is unfortunately one in which there is no place for people like me. Not because non-white people have been particularly targeted for exclusion from the

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.rp.pl/Polityka/170608961-CBOS-PiS---42-proc-PO---21-proc.html>.

national community, but because the existence of those like myself were simply never factored into PiS's vision of Polishness. From PiS's rhetoric and tone, it is quite clear that in their view, to be Polish means to be white. Anything else is an aberration.

And while racism is not the aim of the PiS project, it is certainly a by-product they are willing to tolerate. If one of the costs of forging a more assertive Polish identity is a couple of blacks and Arabs getting beat up in the streets by skinheads who see that as "patriotism," then so be it. Hence, despite a rise in racially-motivated violence in Poland, the government dismisses any talk of racism being an issue in the country.<sup>20</sup> On the contrary, Interior Minister Mariusz Błaszczak has said racism is non-existent in Poland, but a problem of Western Europe: "Germany and France do indeed have such problems. But those problems are consequences of many years of the policy of multiculturalism, the opening of their borders to immigrants from North Africa and the Middle-East."<sup>21</sup> PiS's logic is seductively straightforward: "No non-white immigrants, no problems with racism." Simple.

As for any unpleasantness experienced by the tiny non-white population currently living in Poland, the brutal reality is there are so few of us, we can be ignored at will without any negative consequences for PiS whatsoever. And that is exactly the kind of Poland PiS wants, one where there are no pesky minority groups sizeable enough to be impossible to ignore.

Another brutal reality is that I think most Poles also want Poland to remain that way, after what they see as the failure of multiculturalism in Western Europe. Hence, I predict PiS will enjoy further success in their efforts to entrench their vision of national identity. Polish public opinion has generally shifted very much to the right in recent years; there is currently no leftist party in the Polish parliament.

<sup>20</sup> Radio Zet, "Rośnie liczba przestępstw na tle rasistowskim. Potrzebne słowa potępienia!," last modified April 24, 2017, <http://wiadomosci.radiozet.pl/Polska/Ksenofobia-i-rasizm-w-Polsce>.

<sup>21</sup> Hubert Orzechowski, "Rasizm w Polsce nie istnieje? Fakty przeczą słowom Błaszczaka," *Newsweek Polska*, last modified January 1, 2017, <http://www.newsweek.pl/polska/spoleczenstwo/rasizm-w-polsce-nie-istnieje-twierdzi-mariusz-blaszczak,artykuly,403042,1.html>.

## A NATIONALIST ERA

The winds of history are blowing in Kaczyński's favor. His feel-good identity offer of Polish moral superiority and an ever-noble history will continue to appeal to many Poles. Paraphrasing the sociologist Emile Durkheim's assertion that in "religious worship, society adores its own camouflaged image," Ernest Gellner argued that "in a nationalist age, societies worship themselves brazenly and openly" without the camouflage.<sup>22</sup> Socialized in a country that has incorporated Catholicism into its national culture so integrally that the worship of God is often conflated with reverence for the nation, and vice-versa, it is easy to see how the brand of nationalism PiS preaches can be so instinctively alluring for many Poles. Combine this with PiS's growing grip on Poles' historical memory, and barring a political earthquake of some sort, it is difficult to imagine what could stop them, and more importantly, their ideas, from shaping Poland's future for many years to come.

If PiS retains power after the 2019 parliamentary elections, giving it four more years in charge of all the attitude-shaping apparatuses of the state, it is likely to be successful in entrenching its vision of *Homo Polonicus*, one who will combine some of the established traits of Polishness with new characteristics: a strong anti-liberalism, skepticism towards Western social norms in general, and a proudly self-centered belief that while Poland is owed for its past sufferings, it does not owe the world anything. A Poland dominated by Kaczyński's *Homo Polonicus* would be a very difficult partner to deal with, not only for Western Europe, but for its Visegrad partners as well.

Meanwhile, the logic of democracy would leave Polish politicians little choice but to parrot the views of such a *Homo Polonicus* if they want to win power, ensuring a self-perpetuating identity-entrenching cycle. We got a taste of this in May 2017, when Grzegorz Schetyna, leader of the "liberal" opposition party, Civic Platform (PO), announced PO was against refugees coming to Poland,<sup>23</sup> despite the fact

<sup>22</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2008), 55.

<sup>23</sup> "Schetyna brnie ws. uchodźców. 'Dziś problem nie istnieje.' Ale dziennikarka nie odpuściła," May 10, 2017, <http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/7,114884,21788647,schetyna-brnie-ws-uchodzcow-dzis-problem-nie-istnieje-ale.html>.

that when his party was in power in 2015, as foreign minister, he supported accepting 7,000 relocated asylum-seekers. Although Schetyna later tried to retract his statement after an uproar from liberal media, the incident made it painfully clear which way the winds are blowing in Poland right now. Jarosław Kaczyński may well end up ruling Poland well beyond his lifetime.



## CONCLUSION

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JO HARPER

The very notion of media narratives—a term itself spun by many working in the media—presupposes that media objectivity is not beyond contestation, taking aim at its own, often implicit, claim to be a sovereign benchmark. These are stories we tell ourselves and each other, fitting in facts that support them and leaving out those that do not. It is a problematic and disconcerting—if indicative—claim and, if taken seriously, it opens the door a little wider to an understanding of how populist discourse acquired political (electoral) traction in 2015–18 in Poland and elsewhere.

Narratives, after all, have to have some connection with the world as it is lived, to help those on the synchronic end of the semantic chain actually speak, to put the ideology into a vernacular that people understand. Trump knew how to do it, as did Kaczyński.

The liberalism out of which the nineteenth-century *Economist* and *Financial Times* sprouted, thus also came under the spotlight, not for reporting untruths, but for failing to understand the power of the sacred—myth, belief—in politics and also its own role in defining and defending a certain truth as if it were somehow neutral, objective and perhaps even scientific. The standard benchmarks—embedded in the mythology of “the Westminster Model,” and “the Washington Consensus”—had to be explained in a way that had not appeared necessary in 1989 in Eastern Europe or perhaps since 1945 elsewhere, in particular in their Western European and North American heartlands. The previously predominant counter-hegemonic discourse—of sectional interest, division and conflict, and elites and the rest fostered with decreasing success in the West by Marxist thinkers—had been rebuilding in more inchoate ways since the 2007–8 financial crisis and found

expression in the absence of a politically coordinated Left, in the words of PiS.

Attacks on the independence of the Constitutional Tribunal and the Supreme Court, the state media, civil service, and army, added to social welfare- and nationalization-heavy policies and a regressive social agenda. Within six months of winning the September 2015 election, PiS had launched assaults on three bastions of the post-1989 settlement: liberal democracy, the liberal economy, and liberal society.

PiS sought to construct a mythological narrative whose tactical elements appeared to be quasi-autonomous but were in fact closely tied to longer-term strategic objectives—what Wysocka identified as the relationship between “soft” and “hard” populism. If the deeper—“hard populism”—narrative holds water, then everyday discourse, or “soft populism,” becomes more natural, as Bouchard points out. Thus, one PiS tactic was to move forward three steps at a time, and if held back by popular and/or international opposition, for example in July 2017 with its three-pronged attack on judicial independence—it could take two steps back and still be one step ahead of where it started, while at the same time also appearing conciliatory. Furthermore, the more opposition to the direction PiS was taking, the stronger—PiS argued—the need to confront it. This seems to have been a predominant part of PiS logic: attack makes explicit that which had been implicit, drawing enemies out into the open.

The EU, the US, the OSCE and the IMF—predictably—cried foul, as did the quickly established pro-democracy opposition, and the Western media and commentariat largely followed suit. Battle lines were soon drawn inside Poland and internationally. The dialogical format was one that had been brewing for years: PO, the globalist’s neoliberal Warsaw proxy versus a resurgent *Positivist* Polish nationalism in the form of PiS. In some ways it was akin to the dichotomy of Positivists (realists) versus Romantics (idealists), in Adam Bromke’s usage of the terms.<sup>1</sup>

The latter’s populist surge drew on growing skepticism among many Poles of the EU and Brussels-friendly elites in Warsaw. Brought

<sup>1</sup> Adam Bromke, *Poland’s Politics: Idealism Vs. Realism* (Harvard University Press, 1967).

up to feel more European than most other Europeans<sup>2</sup>—a perception largely built up in the abstract and then often painfully tested against reality—many Poles had seen themselves as willing students of the West, a feeling that was not reciprocated in some crucial respects.<sup>3</sup> And that seemed true also among many PO supporters and demonstrators against PiS.

At the same time, the hegemonic liberal discourse that *The Financial Times* and others were expressing (or simply leaving unquestioned) was—alongside a toothless Left and ageing secular-humanistic intelligentsia—coming under attack, seemingly opening the door for alternatives. In this context, the re-emergence of PiS as an electoral force could not be unanticipated. It drew on the older mythologies of national salvation but combined them with a very *positivist* version of the present. Meanwhile, PO thought it could ignore the sublime elements of national mythology and bind itself with the EU (see, for example, the Radosław Sikorski and Anne Applebaum axis<sup>4</sup>) by seeking to “take the politics out of politics,” as Rychard puts it, just when “politics” was making a comeback. But PO’s promises—increasingly unmet—could not provide the post-Tusk ballast needed to regain power in 2015.

### ILLIBERALISM OR ALIBERALISM?

Attempts to explain PiS’s illiberalism—what it is, why and how it arrived, and where it will take us—tend to end up in a tautological argument that merely exacerbates the initial sense of explanatory

<sup>2</sup> Steven Swinford, “Poland is Leading the Way for England’s Schools, Education Secretary Says,” *The Daily Telegraph*, January 19, 2015. “Polish parents who come to the UK say they cannot believe how easy the national curriculum is compared to what they are used to.”

<sup>3</sup> For example, then French President Jacques Chirac’s attack on Polish support for the Iraq war. The EU response: “Chirac Attack’ Carries Potential Risks,” *Radio Free Europe*, March 19, 2003. Current French president, Emmanuel Macron’s reaction: “Macron says Eastern Europe Betrayed EU, Polish FM wants Explanation,” *Polish Radio*, June 22, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> “Polish Journalist Slams *Washington Post* Columnist Applebaum,” *Polish Radio—the news.pl*, November 21, 2016; Marek Ostrowski, “Sikorski and Applebaum: Polska znika. Nie wystarczy maszerować, trzeba się zaangażować,” *Polityka*, December 13, 2016; Joy Lo Dico, “The Sikorski Set: the Polish Foreign Minister Has Locked Horns with Cameron—but Their History Goes Back to the Bullingdon Club,” *Evening Standard*, June 26, 2014.

impotence. PiS is illiberal because what we describe is that of an entity whose words and deeds contradict certain apparently liberal norms. Other than highlighting the ways in which it has diverged from the consensus economic and social tracks of the previous three decades, its attacks on the constitution and civic liberties have mainly been in the realm of what others believe its intentions might be. Its agenda was still notionally democratic, if a rather muscular version. There was little to suggest an EU member whose security and economy are so closely allied with its NATO and EU memberships will postpone elections, for example, and opposition to PiS runs very high in some parts of the country. Predictions are not something to be recommended given the fluidity with which politics is changing, but this matrix remains strongly embedded.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, during this period, liberalism in its various forms was coming under attack from several sources all over the Western world: internal and external, economic and cultural, institutional and normative. Added to this, the apparent disconnect between a more or less consensual form of reality and political and public discourse was central to this sense of unease. Post-modern thought, after all, had long poked at what it calls the Enlightenment Project, positing it as merely one narrative of truth among others, with no intrinsic superiority. Meanwhile, the Left had traditionally claimed that the mainstream media was in the business of distorting reality, in this sense to support a capitalist agenda. And then Donald Trump came along, with his notion of “fake news,” driving left-liberals to defend a mainstream version of the truth that many had been picking holes in. The hated status quo thus suddenly became the core of values that needed defending.

This inability to define a central causal paradigm for this illiberal turn exacerbated the sense of crisis. Old certainties disappeared, although it was not clear what they were being replaced with. For some of those apparently doing the attacking from within, there was no single or standard benchmark for liberalism, or if there was, it was one that had become infected with false prophets such as “gender ideology” and multiculturalism. PiS in particular seemed to offer an-

<sup>5</sup> Jo Harper, “Negating Negation, Civic Platform, Law and Justice, and the Struggle over ‘Polishness,’” *Problems of Post-Communism* 57 (2010): 78–96.

swers based on a canny opportunistic discourse mixing moral certainties, which never change, and national interests, which do. For the Right, social liberalism was the enemy, part of a degeneration of “European values,” while for the Left, liberal economics was. PiS took elements of both critiques, wrapped them up in a Polish cloak, created a story that had enough internal binding coherence, and sold it to the Polish people.

But why did a society as international, educated, pluralistic, and affluent as Poland’s buy into this? After all, Polish society has clearly always been more conservative on many social issues than most Western European societies, but for twenty-six years voted mostly for moderate center-right or center-left parties, all committed to managing a mixed but essentially free market economy inside the EU.

The answer, of course, requires a multi-layered explanation, but first, perhaps, one needs to recall that PiS won the election in 2015 with only about 40 percent of a voter turnout of around 60 percent. That means maybe three quarters of Poles did not vote for the party, and that makes any definitive conclusion problematic.<sup>6</sup>

#### i) The mythological superstructure

To explain the shock of a resurgent national discourse in 2015, some delved back into a bag that many had thought—or perhaps just hoped—would become obsolete after 1989, one that contained the classic interpretations of Polish history focused on retracing the contours of its fight for independence and subsequent struggles to maintain it.

A brief recap: the Polish nationalist tradition is split, crudely, between Romanticism and Positivism, the former perhaps more closely connected with a civic version of nationhood, the latter to ethno-nationalism.

A form of political realist nationalism borrowing from Positivism, meanwhile, emerged after the defeat of the January 1863 Uprising. Later on, this was adapted in the ideology of the National Democracy, the *Endecja* period of the 1930s, led by Roman Dmowski.<sup>7</sup> This

<sup>6</sup> Jo Harper, “Kaczynski Changed the Game,” *Deutsche Welle*, July 14, 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Barbara Törnquist-Plewa, *The Wheel of Polish Fortune. Myths in Polish Collective Consciousness during the First Years of Solidarity* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1992), 115–74.

period rejected the Romantic principle of “shared history” as a foundation for building a nation and based the notion of nation on linguistic, ethnic, and religious criteria and wanted the future Poland to be ethnically homogeneous.

Throughout much of the twentieth century, including during the communist period (in particular after 1956, reaching an apogee in the 1968 anti-Semitic purges), this strand of nationalism can arguably be seen as predominant. The more inclusive civic—*Romantic*—version was subsumed, only to reawake in 1989. Or so it seemed.

PiS can be treated as part of this *Realistic-Positivist* tradition, with an emphasis on muscular national pride, a Poland that seeks to assert itself in the world, to show it has something unique to offer, not just a place that consumes others’ culture, products, practices, music, sociological norms, and language, while exporting its labor. As Janion<sup>8</sup> and others hoped, this part of the national psyche did not fade away after 1989 but went underground and resurrected itself in 2005 and then again in 2015. Thus, simmering beneath the surface was the age-old struggle over the Polish soul, not an area that gets much coverage in the *Daily Telegraph*.<sup>9</sup>

As Attila Ágh argues there has always been a struggle between two main narratives within the EU: the modernization narrative (“look at Paris”—a famous, often repeated slogan referring the French Revolutions) and the traditionalization narrative (the “Glorious Past that Never Was”).<sup>10</sup> “In some progressive periods the modernization narrative was the dominant, but in the decline periods the traditionalization narrative came back with a vengeance,” he argues. “The dream of quick Europeanization in the semi-periphery relied on the concep-

<sup>8</sup> M. Janion, *Bohater spisek, śmierć. Wykłady żydowskie* (Warszawa: Virtualo, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Noah Buyon, “You’re Scumbags,’ says Right-wing Polish Politician,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 20, 2017. “The battle for Poland’s soul just took an ugly turn down memory lane [. . .] Jarosław Kaczyński, the head of the ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party, invoked the most tragic episode in recent Polish history during a raucous parliamentary debate Wednesday over a contentious law to overhaul—and, opponents say, politicize—the country’s judiciary. ‘I know you are afraid of the truth, but don’t wipe your treacherous mugs with my late brother’s name,’ Jarosław Kaczyński fumed in Poland’s legislative body. ‘You destroyed him, murdered him. You’re scumbags.’”

<sup>10</sup> Attila Ágh, “Cultural War and Reinventing the Past in Poland and Hungary: The Politics of Historical Memory in East-Central Europe,” *Polish Political Science Yearbook* 45 (2016): 123–134.

tual framework of the ‘Western fallacy,’ according to which the rapid Western developments after WWII could be repeated. Public discourse has been split more and more between the two dominant narratives of the EU-centered Modernization and the Nation State-centered Traditionalization. The main effects of global crisis have not appeared only in their changing contents, but first of all in their relationship. Simply said, the major change due to the global crisis is that the Nation-State/Traditionalisation narrative has defeated the Europeanization/Modernization narrative,” Ágh argues.

## ii) The outsiders’ narrative

The Western media, and also many in the business community, the EU and IMF delegations, and some academics quite clearly played a role in normatively constructing a version of Poland—and of PO—it wanted to see created. The world of shiny new Warsaw skyscrapers and new roads seemed to fit the data from Warsaw, with a booming economy, an entrepreneurial society, and the emergence of a more mature democracy. Many tended to sideline those elements that did not fit this story.

It seems clear, for example, that much of the Anglo-American media misunderstood or simply ignored the depth of antipathy to the effects of globalization, and not just in Poland. The effects on community identities of mass emigration (as well as immigration), for example, tended not to be seen as a price worth paying for “progress.” This was compounded in the Polish case by an inability to see the “other Poland,” the one that does not speak free market English. It required hearing the noises below the surface and reading between the lines to see how Polish culture appears to tolerate foreigners but ultimately seeks to manage its own affairs in its own way. More damagingly perhaps was a disregard for alternatives to conventional economic wisdom, which meant that those affected directly by changes in the workplace had few other places to turn. The postcommunist Left had little leverage among the working class, while the PO narrative was seen as being Brussels- and investor-friendly.

Furthermore, in many ways this Globalist narrative was as resistant to adaptation to new realities—or old ones that had not quite died

out—as was that of PiS. Its tone was often a little dismissive and seemingly blind to its own biases. The development path that Rychard discusses in this volume is illustrative of this rigidity. Norman Davies’ “Western triumphalism” that Darasz mentions here also adds to the sense that something was being missed. Just as PO was seeking to abolish politics, politics was making a comeback. Poland had not quite caught up with the West in terms of its postcommunist democratic culture, but was simultaneously entering a new form of politics that had not been previously navigated, even in the more advanced West.

This is not to say the Globalist analysis—as far as it went—of PiS was wrong, empirically or normatively. Rather, its lack of contextual depth and an inability to see its own role in the process again narrowed the field of language down to a certain type of position that was, at times, difficult to distinguish from that espoused by the EU, the IMF, “the markets,” credit rating agencies, and others in the business world.

The disinclination of the Western media to countenance any rethinking of neoliberalism—in Poland too—is well illustrated in a *Financial Times* editorial from May 2016. “As an all-purpose insult, ‘neoliberalism’ has lost any meaning it might once have had,” it read. “Whether it is a supposed sin of commission, such as privatization; one of omission, such as allowing a bankrupt company to close; or just an outcome with some losers, neoliberalism has become the catch-all criticism of unthinking radicals who lack the skills of empirical argument. It gives succor to oppressive regimes around the world which also position themselves as crusaders against neoliberalism, subjugating their populations with inefficient economic policy and extreme inequality using the full power of the state.”<sup>11</sup>

The fragment above provides insight into the newspaper’s ideological predilections. “Some losers” is a term that pops up as often in the Western media’s discussions of Poland’s so-called *Polska B* as it does in explanations of Brexit, and the rise of Trump and Le Pen. It is

<sup>11</sup> *The Financial Times*’ editorial from May 30, 2016. Others deserve credit for noting at least some of the contradictions. Adrian Karatnycky in *Politico*, for example, on December 15, 2015, and also Charles Crawford in *The Daily Telegraph*, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/poland/11954733/Who-are-Poland-victorious-Law-and-Justice-party-and-what-do-they-want.html>.



a line that reveals much. As mainstream economics has tended to minimize labor as just one factor of production among others, these “losers” may be those whose factory was closed down and whose electricity bills rose after their publicly owned utility was privatized. This is as true in Detroit and Bolton as it is in Skarbimierz.<sup>12</sup>

As the consensus political discourse after 1989 was largely unable to understand the need for a Left alternative at all,<sup>13</sup> after 2015 it sought factual—empirical—holes in the PiS narrative, without understanding it as an act of faith, a story that is either accepted in its entirety or not at all. So, when PiS tells its story, one that has very little overlap with the Globalist one, it posits a binary choice of interpretative frameworks. The notion of other truths is discarded. The liberal Western—Anglo—American—media, rooted in the empirical tradition, could not cope with this apparent intransigence of inductive continental thinking. It was seen as an attack on a whole way of life, a whole system of thought. Both stories, then, are in some senses about betrayal; the Globalists’ rests on the betrayal of the guiding hand and coffers of Brussels, and PiS’s narrative tells of the selling out of Polish industry and historical identity.

Erinc Yeldan argues the term “globalization” carries a dual conceptual meaning, as a definition and also a policy recipe. “As a definition, the term refers to the increased integration of the world’s commodity and finance markets and its cultural and social values . . . At a more general level, this process entails . . . a program for destroying collective structures which may impede the pure market logic.”<sup>14</sup>

So, PiS and PO resemble a modern version of this clash over which version of “1989” will win out: the inclusivist or exclusivist interpretation? For PiS, the question is how to reclaim the transition as part of the insurrectionary tradition and, for PO, it is how to finally put that tradition to bed. In this light, the political and personal clashes be-

<sup>12</sup> James Meek, “Somerdale to Skarbimierz, James Meek Follows Cadbury to Poland,” *London Review of Books*, 39, no. 8–20 (2017).

<sup>13</sup> See Wolfgang Streeck, “Hoping, Doping, and Coping,” interview by Jo Harper, *DW.com*, March 7, 2017. Streeck is a German political scientist and a professor at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies in Cologne.

<sup>14</sup> Erinc Yeldan, “Financialization of the World Economy, ‘Credible Governance,’ Lopsided Growth and Vanishing Jobs,” [http://www.networkideas.org/feathm/mar2007/PDF/Erinc\\_Yeldan.pdf](http://www.networkideas.org/feathm/mar2007/PDF/Erinc_Yeldan.pdf).

tween Jarosław Kaczyński and Donald Tusk reflect different ways of approaching questions of modernity, democracy, the “West,” the open society, and reflect in turn Poland’s mixture of Eastern and Western political culture.

So far, so good perhaps. But evocation of historical archetypes does not win elections. Or does it?

### iii) Social tectonics, political triggers, and opportunities

A second, more prosaic, explanation is needed alongside an understanding of deeper shifts in social dynamics since 1989. First, one needs to deal with the rise and fall of PO, and secondly with the social dimension and how and why new models of societal promise were not met. The disconnect between discourse and social reality plays a key role here.

With the electoral collapse of the postcommunist SLD and the slow demise of the liberal intelligentsia after 2005, the path was cleared for PO to sweep up the secular center ground. And the temptation has been strong to see PO as a “Western” party that is strong on civil society, due process, social liberalism, committed to a separation of church and state, and so on. All the opposites could be neatly bundled up and dropped in the lap of PiS. But this formulation is problematic.

This meta-narrative, for example, ignores the fact that many of the ministers in the PiS government are mostly sober-minded officials with track records in academia, diplomacy, and the business world. It is, thus, a government of mixed messages,<sup>15</sup> the expression of a political

<sup>15</sup> The government is organizationally divided into three wings: PiS has a national-Catholic profile with a conservative worldview, supplemented by various leftist parties, while PR is economically liberal. The government is made up of competing groups, that can be categorized as follows: 1. Ideological praetorians: the most important group as far as political influence and personal aspirations are concerned. It includes Antoni Macierewicz, Mariusz Błaszczak, Mariusz Kamiński, and Witold Waszczykowski; 2. Managers are an interesting category, intentionally part of the government as a counterbalance to the previous groups. It was primarily composed of Mateusz Morawiecki, Anna Streżyńska, Henryk Kowalczyk, and Paweł Szalamacha, but also Konrad Szymański and Konstanty Radziwiłł. Their loyalty towards Kaczyński is the natural justification of their nomination; 3. Pragmatists are aware that their relationship with PiS constitutes the chance of consolidation or even the further strengthening their political positions. This group includes Jarosław Gowin and Piotr Gliński.

agreement resulting in the establishment of an electoral coalition bloc, the United Right (ZP). Its three unequal components are: Law and Justice (PiS), which is the hegemonic structure, Solidarity Poland (SP), and Poland Together (PR).

Clearly, international elites in the world of business, media, and politics saw themselves reflected in PO's image, and the party did play an intermediary role between Western capital and the Polish economy in connections in Brussels, London, Berlin, and Washington. PO leaders were also drawn from the same social milieu—in some cases—as the Western reporters they would be lunching with, the EU officials they would be negotiating with, and the financial investors they hoped to entice. After its 2007 election win, the PO narrative was largely indistinct from the Western media picture, underpinned by the European Commission, IMF, and “the markets.” EU membership appeared to consolidate the Europeanization of a PO-led Poland, linking the new middle classes and elites with their counterparts in Brussels and elsewhere.

But by 2014 PO was seen as abrogating its socially liberal image because of its half-hearted support for *in vitro* legislation, abortion, same sex marriage, and other areas of social policy, among other things. On the economically liberal side, its pensions U-turn in 2014 was also seen as undermining its free market credentials. By the time the elections rolled around in 2015, PO had apparently dislodged itself from the 1989 Round Table apparatus. But was it a party that could claim to speak for anyone other than a mainly urban aspiring middle class? Probably not. Its failure to support an appropriate commemoration for the Smoleńsk victims seemed to compound this.

#### iv) Back to the Future

So, the door was left ajar for PiS, whose story, or brand, was well-known and had not changed much. It stepped into the breach. PiS said it wanted to scrap the Third Republic built from the agreements of 1989, but in many ways, the party offers a return to key elements of the pre-1989 past.

Its legitimization is, in a sense, a return to pre-1989 without the communist party. It winds the clock back to communist forms in several

key ways: through appeals to teleological, inductive, and totalizing thinking; its use of ethno-nationalism; its moralistic answers to complex questions; and anti-pluralism and one-party style democracy. It is hard not to see this brand of patriotic moralism and ethno-exclusivism as a reaction to this failure, not just of the media, but of the colonizing project of the liberal center-left and center-right.

PiS has sought to recenter Polish politics via symbols, bringing people together with the notions and slogans of nationalizing or “re-polonizing” the economy— of “taking things back.” Smoleńsk, Jedwabne, Wałęsa, Tusk and others merely act as instruments for telling this story and driving their regressive agenda. They can be used interchangeably, disregarding any semblance of empirical fact, to fit into a story that is simple to tell, simple to hear, and is constantly repeated. History, in this way, is not about the past, but about the ever-lived present.

#### NEITHER GOOD NOR BAD, BUT THINKING MAKES IT SO?

Perhaps the key question is whether Poland has actually changed since 2015 or if PiS reflects a set of societal values that have remained largely unchanged but mostly politically latent?

As Adekoya argues, the likes of *Gazeta Wyborcza* had been successful in persuading Poles that in order for Poland to be as successful as a Western European nation, Poles needed to shed some of their cultural identity and act more like the French and the British. Well, many did, but after time many may have concluded it neither helped them nor Poland very much. There is an increasingly widespread view in Polish society that Western Europe has lost its way because it is run by people blinded with political correctness and multiculturalist fantasies; people who no longer defend European values and identity. Poles simply feel far more confident expressing ideas today, which they would not have spoken out loud some years ago.

So, referring back to Bouchard’s “sociology of myth,” one can see that perhaps the first stages of his three stage myth-making process was by 2018 largely achieved—*diffusion* and *ritualization*—although

## CONCLUSION

heavily contested at each turn, while stage three, *sacralization*, proved somewhat harder to attain. The narrative has clearly disrupted the existing status quo, with protagonists facing an intensifying number of conflicts and mini-climaxes, but as of 2018, we had seen no clear or decisive turning point, and resolution—and *sacralization*—still seems only a distant possibility.



PART IV

# INTERVIEWS





## HISTORY AS WE MAY WISH IT TO BE

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JAN GROSS

INTERVIEWED BY JO HARPER IN APRIL 2016

In early 2016, President Andrzej Duda mulled revoking a state medal given to Polish-American historian Jan Gross. As a Princeton University professor, Gross angered many Poles in 2015, telling *Die Welt* that the roots of Poland's reluctance toward helping in the refugee crisis in Europe could be found in the treatment of Jews during World War Two.

"The right wing press and others raised hell after my comments. I spoke about Kaczyński's speech about refugees, about his use of terminology that associated refugees with disease, something that everyone knows has its roots in the Nazi language of the Second World War. This is totally out of synch with Polish traditions," Gross says.

But the line that appeared to make Gross PiS's public enemy number one was the one in which he said Poles had killed more Jews—in pogroms, murders of Jews who fled the ghettos, and by turning Jews over to the Nazis—than Germans during the war.

"About 17,000 Germans were killed during the September 1939 campaign, about 7,000 during the Warsaw Rising of 1944 and another 10,000 during the war. Many more Jews were murdered, not only at [the town of] Jedwabne, but in many similar types of massacres. Auxiliary police, fire brigades, ordinary people killed Jews fleeing from the ghettos. Of the 250,000 Jews that survived the war many were killed by Poles, some assisting German units."

Gross is best known for his 2001 book *Neighbors*, which describes the 1941 massacre of 1,600 Jews by Polish villagers in Jedwabne in northeastern Poland.

Duda told a television station that his office had received 2,000 letters asking him to withdraw the medal awarded to Gross in 1996. The order is given to foreigners or expatriate Poles who have “rendered great service to the Polish nation.” Gross received it for his opposition to the communist regime.

Duda wants a new politics of history and has said it is a key part of his presidency. He has invited heads of cultural institutions and museums to come up with a new history, one that celebrates rather than berates Poles.

The mythology of “the innocent Pole,” and many very ambivalent symbolic associations tied up with Poland’s Jewish past resurfaced. The IPN had to deal with the postcommunist SLD-led government, which was willing to apologize to the relatives of those murdered at Jedwabne on behalf of the nation.

A counter-narrative, common in some quarters in Poland, is one that plays on certain Jewish stereotypes and an unspoken (at least publicly unspoken) series of largely associational leaps that link Jews with communism, Bolshevism, betrayal, exploitation of their Catholic neighbors, cowardice, and many other things. SLD was, after all, part of the problem, not the solution, for many.

The far right and outlets for national Catholic opinion such as *Radio Maryja* have played on these assumptions in part, infusing any public debate on the issue with questions of international pressure, often phrased as forms of Jewish pressure on issues of property restitution, for example.

The process of revelation gained renewed speed with the 2005 publication of another book by Gross entitled *Fear*, about a pogrom after the war in Kielce in 1946.<sup>1</sup> This played a part in defining and driving an emerging narrative, which recognized Poles as perpetrators of crimes during the war as well as victims, thus touching a central plank of the Kaczyński mythology, namely Poles’ purity as victims and heroes, or both.

<sup>1</sup> In English, published as Jan T. Gross, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz: An Essay in Historical Interpretation* (New York: Random House, 2007).

“PiS itself is not overtly anti-Semitic,” Gross continues. “But by association with *Radio Maryja*, and *Nasz Dziennik* it feeds on associations with anti-Semitic rhetoric. The language used about the refugees is sinister, these strangers in our midst that carry disease. There are no Jews in Poland, so to be anti-Semitic is a sign of some kind of personal pathology.”

“PiS is obsessed with stimulating a patriotic sense of duty, and given that most Poles do not know their own history very well, and think that Poles suffered as much as Jews during the war, the new regime is playing into a language of catholic martyrology. This was a dream world of the *Endeka* (Christian Democrats) before the war,” Gross says.

The Kaczyński division of the postcommunist world into “us and them” gave Gross’s revelations added significance and clearly played a role in reinforcing their already strong sense of defensiveness and discourses of national persecution.

For many Poles, the two books represent another case of anti-Polonism, explicable in part as a collective defense mechanism against feelings of guilt (which the “Poles as victims and heroes” line does not allow for), and is something that Gross himself identifies: that of blaming the victim.

The symbolism of martyrdom and collective apportioning of blame and victimhood are powerful forces in Polish society, in particular in provincial and rural communities, PiS’s natural heartland, and PiS has sought to blur Gross’s claims by associational—not direct—references to Jewish claims for property restitution in Poland.

This can be seen, in turn, as an implicit nod in the direction of *Radio Maryja*, which defiantly plays on a traditional set of identifiable stereotypes and fears about Jews, and other “Others.” Others, some closer to PiS than *Radio Maryja*, have also sought to downplay the “Gross discourse,” and have used a combination of scholarly critique and popular narratives that portray Poland as a beleaguered nation, attacked by all sides, and take on anti-Polonism, seemingly to deflect the impact of Gross’s allegations.

A central, collective theme in this version of the national narrative, and one that PiS attempts to exploit, is that of a morally clean nation that has witnessed horror but has not been an active collaborator in it.

Since the first days of the postcommunist era, voices on the nationalist right have called for a national accounting of what it calls “the crimes of the communist period,” to open the official files and allow the legal process to take its course.

While relatively new to a Polish audience, this is not an area untouched in the Western academic world. Michał Chęciński’s *Poland, Communism, Nationalism, Anti-Semitism* condemned the communist regime for its mistreatment of Jews, and accused the communists of fomenting anti-Semitic incidents, most notably at Kielce in 1946.<sup>2</sup> Krystyna Kersten’s *Polacy, Żydzi, Komunizm. Anatomia półprawd 1939–68*, published in 1992, challenged the popular perception that Jews were closely linked to the establishment of that regime.<sup>3</sup> But Gross’s book *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*, published in 2001, was the first clear statement that Poles had been willing perpetrators of genocide against Jews.

Gross was accused of having misused evidence or failing to draw the right conclusions, charges made by Tomasz Strzembosz, Leszek Żebrowski, Piotr Gontarczyk, and Marek Chodakiewicz. East European Monographs published *After the Holocaust: Polish-Jewish Conflicts in the Wake of the World War II*, in which the author, Chodakiewicz, presents the debate on distortions in the understanding of the relationship between the actions of Christians and Jews in Polish territories during the post-war period.

A number of well-known Polish academics came out in defense of Gross and published an open letter in the newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*.

“Whether the Polish government and president decide to strip Jan Gross of the Order of Merit will not make a difference to Jan Gross,” says Anita J. Prazmowska, Professor of International History at the London School of Economics. “He will still continue to be known as a historian of undoubted quality and a man of courage. It is not he who discredited Poland or dishonored it. What he did was to find evidence and to publish boldly evidence of anti-Semitism in occupied and postwar Poland. What the government should be doing is fo-

<sup>2</sup> Michael Chęciński, *Poland, Communism, Nationalism, Anti-Semitism* (New York: Karz-Cohl Publishers, 1982).

<sup>3</sup> Krystyna Kersten, *Polacy, Żydzi, komunizm: anatomia półprawd, 1939–68* (Warszawa: Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza, 1992).

cusing on a proper debate of Polish history and on fostering an understanding of Polish history. What this petty (for that is all this gesture is) act will do is discredit the PiS government and consolidate the international perception that it is driven by a narrow nationalist agenda. A shot in its own foot.”<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, US historian Timothy Snyder said he would return his Order of Merit if Gross loses his.<sup>5</sup>

“What is happening is totally incompatible with Polish history, of openness and multiculturalism,” Gross concludes. “PiS is dismantling the foundations of democratic politics in Poland. It is using the language of Smoleńsk and national tragedy to legitimize its attacks on institutions. This could be the start of an authoritarian regime and is profoundly disturbing.”

<sup>4</sup> Jo Harper, “Poland Turns History into Diplomatic Weapon,” *Politico*, February 19, 2016.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

## 966 AND ALL THAT

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NEAL ASCHERSON

INTERVIEWED BY JAN DARASZ IN APRIL 2016

They say you should never meet your heroes ... but what do they know! Neal Ascherson, in works like *Black Sea*, *The King Incorporated* and *Struggles for Poland* and his reporting on the decolonization of Africa and Europe, combines both the necessary fact and feel of reportage and gives ample scope for reflection on the meaning of history and the passing of things: the *lacrimae rerum*.

We met in the lobby of the Bristol Hotel, where he first stayed when he was a student in the 1950s, and where he was guest speaker at the annual dinner of the Oxford and Cambridge Society of Poland in March 2016.

We talked first about the present impasse in Polish politics.

*The rift between the two options seems to be widening. Any possibility of compromise? Your Guardian piece<sup>1</sup> wrote of a “winner takes all” attitude in Polish politics.*

NA: It looks as if the gap is widening and neither side is backing down and both sides are in some respects, are gaining in self-confidence. I think the latest reports, if they are reliable, suggest about the so-called Campaign for the Defense of Democracy that they are becoming very strong indeed among the population including some of some people who actually voted for this government, the Law and

<sup>1</sup> Neal Ascherson, “The Assault on Democracy in Poland is Dangerous for the Poles and All Europe,” *The Guardian*, January 17, 2016.

Justice (PiS) party in the last elections. So they have some confidence that they may manage to make a united opposition. The government, the governing party are not apparently discouraged by the fact that they were criticized by the EU. They have further plans possibly well certainly about continuing to replace officials in nationalized industries, in various points in the administration and the law, and there's no sign that they are retreating on these, so both sides appear to be gaining in confidence and nobody, so far looks like pushing to retreat.

*You can hear talk from Law and Justice critics of a Piłsudski-style May 1926 coup, not bringing the army on to the streets, but abolishing the Constitutional Tribunal (in May 1926, Marshal Józef Piłsudski, Poland's victor in the war against the Bolsheviks in 1920 led a coup and established a colonel's dictatorship, the Sanacja or Cleansing, regime that lasted until September 1939).*

NA: Any attempt to carry out a constitutional or unconstitutional coup would be catastrophic because it would actually meet with real resistance, which I think would be a physical resistance of a serious kind. And though one has to say that Piłsudski did it because he had the armed forces behind him, not the whole army, but part of it, and he was able to impress his will. Here this is really not the case. The last thing the army, the armed forces, and the ministry of defense want to do is to get mixed up in head-on political conflict... the beginning of a serious argument about whether a new militia-like force should be set up at provincial level to deal with apparently, anti-government demonstrations. This seems to be an incredibly dangerous idea and I feel that some officials who are to be in charge of this development have said quite squarely we will never order soldiers of the Polish army or of this new force to fire upon civilians, never. If that is true of course, it slightly removes the force, but we don't know. I don't think that, but one can never be quite sure of what will happen, but if there is to be something like a real constitutional change will it be done step by step so that there will be no moment of seizure of power? It is quite true that there is a parallel between Mr Kaczyński and Piłsudski.

*Back seat driver...*

NA: Both back seat drivers who removed themselves from the direct involvement either in the administration or parliamentary life or ministries or anything like that and stood outside, pulling the strings from outside the political process, which is unhealthy thing to do. De Gaulle, of course, did it with some success in his own time. Piłsudski was very successful with it up to a point, but eventually ended in this coup of 1926. I don't think that will happen. I think what they may well do is step by step attempt to introduce a much more presidential constitution which reduces the power and role of opposition quite dramatically, and I suppose it is possible that they would start interfering with the electoral board and so forth. This is a familiar process, but it's a familiar process in banana republics not in a sophisticated large European nation with a great history!

*What shocked me when PiS got into power was the speed and the tempo of their actions and also their opening of wars and conflicts on many fronts. Do you recognize this and is there any method in at all, or is it just madness and chaos?*

NA: Well, there is certainly something a bit mad about it. On the other hand it does look as if a number of people who sat down and thought "if we win, if we gain power, have an absolute majority in the Sejm and so on, what will we do with it, what kind of program do we draw up and if we do have a program which is designed really to make a change in the power structure of Poland, we probably have to do this fast, before the other side, those who PiS regards as their enemies or the enemies of Poland, before they have a chance to react and fortify their positions, so we must act fast." I would assume that's how they thought but I don't know.

*It's "shock and awe" when perhaps they don't need it, given this parliamentary majority?*

NA: Well I think they do need it from their point of view because I think many of them believe what they say, which is that a harmful



clique has got hold of the governance of Poland and its administration, and the divisions of power in the Republic, and these people will have to be removed, and there has to be wholesale change in the leadership of the economy, the law and everything, and that this cannot be done by simply sitting back and waiting for people to retire in a normal civilized way. They think there has got to be a purge.

*Is PiS a revolutionary party then?*

NA: I think that this is how they understand themselves. In a way it's a conservative revolution, if you like to use that term. They feel that Poland has been living since 1989 under the weight of an oppressive regime which has some continuity with the communist past and that this is not an authentic Poland, and that it never will be until the power of this governing clique is broken and everybody they have pointed to have been removed from all the institutions of state and society. I suspect the way that they talk and the way that they write suggests that they have a fully-formed paranoid view of a Poland as under some sort of alien occupation and they have to purge it in their view, and replace it with whatever they think is authentically Polish.

*The sell-out theory is popular isn't it? That the new Poland, the birth pangs, were lies. And that the people, like in the end of Animal Farm, see a seamless transition and they are left outside. So is it possible to rationalize or articulate looking at Poland in this way?*

NA: The *Animal Farm* example is a very intelligent one; it fits. I was here in 1980–81 and I watched the collapse of the communist regime in 1989. The idea that this was a complete sham, a strange pantomime engineered by the Kremlin and various alien forces from the outside world of various ethnic denominations seems to me absolutely incredible. What happened was real! It may be that too many compromises were made in the Round Table process; that's conceivable. But that is not really what is being said. Plenty of people, I remember saying that if you look not even at the Round Table but even at the discussions in 1980 between the government delegations who came to Gdańsk to negotiate and the strikers and Wałęsa and his friends. If

you look at his advisors and then at the people who came to talk, they've got a lot in common. They've had the same background really, they know each other very well, sometimes they even know each other personally, and the fact that one lot has persecuted the other lot matters a lot less than the fact that they had a common, not exactly political but a common social and intellectual background which is not shared by the great mass of working people of Poland in the countryside or the factories. So there was something in it, but actually that something is not very important. The fact that they shared that background doesn't mean that they have just disguised the old communist system in a new guise and replaced it. Far from it.

*Piotr Semka has said that the Round Table was the time when the working class Solidarity was betrayed or hijacked by the intellectuals, who like you alluded to, had much more in common with their opposite numbers, their negotiating partners, than the people they represented. All those compromises, getting the former apparatchiks into the finance ministries etc., that is a good price for this peaceful essentially very peaceful revolution?*

NA: Yes that was the idea at the time. Nobody was sure even then how the Soviet Union, which still existed, would react and the idea was to go carefully, just to do it by stages, bit by bit. I think that what is true is that there is and has been, heaven knows for how long, generations perhaps, a gap between people with higher education, leaderships of every kind, very urban, and the countryside for example. Poland is rather like Germany, where the intellectuals really have a very different culture from the people whom they regard often quite wrongly as ignorant, backward, reactionary and superstitious, living in darkness out there. Certainly German intellectuals have always been a bit like that and the same kind of pattern does exist here.

*I saw one guy today and he had a t-shirt and a slogan, which roughly translated as "Lefties get your paws off our country." And I thought the prissy intellectual, on the one hand, mocking the small town religious, devoted family-orientated, shall we say, conservatives, but then it goes the other way doesn't it, the contempt for the townie, or does it?*

NA: Yes it does go the other way. I think that for me one of the roots of the matter is that the leftists *didn't* get their paws on this country. I put it like this: in 1989 with the collapse of the system there was an immensely traumatic, hugely traumatic event which was tackled by a new Polish regime in a sort of "Somosierra" kind of way. And instead of instituting economic change, slowly, carefully, they just went at it as though they were going over Niagara in a barrel.

*We digressed onto a broader theme. Polish history is not linear or progressive, but lurches or swings, often violently. This is one of the themes in your Struggles for Poland. The Whig or liberal theory of history as a straight line to an ever better future is a luxury here.*

NA: It's not so much about liberalism or Whiggery, it's about social democracy. What happened, not only in Poland, was that at the very moment you needed a social democratic kind of regime, which said 'we're going to protect: we know this transition is going to create a lot of losers as well as some winners, but our duty is to try and hold society together and that means protecting and putting first the interests of those people whose lives are going to be turned inside out, who are going to lose their jobs, whose careers will suddenly disappear. These are the people we have to look after, whose interests need to be protected. Those who are going to make money and become rich, and get prosperous—the usual urban middle class thing, can probably look after themselves, as the economy is slowly privatized. But what about the others? It was just about at that moment when there was this huge need for a caring social democratic gradualist party, rather like the old German Social Democrats used to be, they vanished. And no, the parties of the left in Poland, and it was the re-constituted communist parties or whatever else it was, committed themselves to neo-liberalism. And this left an *enormous* political vacuum in a most sensitive place. And it is not surprising that eventually somebody has moved into this vacuum: an ultra nationalist, highly conservative, traditionalist party, that poses as a party of the losers, a protectionist party to some extent. How much they will really do about that, I'm not sure I don't know.

*We moved onto a recent and painful episode—the Institute of National Remembrance publishing the secret files of former president Lech Wałęsa. Is he Bolek?*

NA: No, I don't think so. There was a lot of panic, I do remember at the time he was president, at the supposed presence of Russian spies occupying important positions in the ministry of defense and that sort of thing, and this was wildly alleged to go back to Wałęsa, but I thought this was all absurd myself, I couldn't see any trace of that. To have signed (the agreement to inform for the secret services) as a rebellious electrician with a large family trying to resist the might of the Polish communist state, being pushed into a corner where you have to sign up or else, he signed to get away from it, to give him more time. That's absolutely understandable to me. I don't put too much blame on him. I mean what was the alternative? He would then have become a martyr of some kind. He would never have had the chance to do what he later did, not least because he wouldn't have got back to work in the Lenin shipyards.

*Is KOD (the Committee for the Defense of Democracy) the spiritual heir to KOR (the 1980s Committee for Workers' Defense)?*

NA: No, because KOR really was the child of a kind of highly idealistic Marxism. It went deliberately to the industrial working class and to their grievances and it spoke in very socialist terms about what was happening and what should be done. And what I see of what KOD publishes and says is very much liberal democratic—it's about human rights, it's about constitutional correctness, the rule of law and so forth. There are overlaps, as we know there were people who were active in KOR now active in KOD, but the organization and the context is so different. It is not the same organization come to life at all.

*With Wałęsa/Bolek, we're still dealing with living memory rather than history, and the legend will always, despite his difficulties, trump the analysis. So in fifty years it's fair to say that Poland could have its history rewritten. Like the great book about Napoleon (Peter Geyl, Na-*

pooleon: For and Against), *in a certain context he's a savior and then when France moves into a bit more prosperity and they hate him again.*

NA: When somebody comes to write the history of Poland or the biography of Wałęsa in 2080, the centenary of the events in August, they will balance what Wałęsa did then and in the succeeding months against this allegation that he somehow sold himself, his soul morally, to the security services or that later some people said that he might have continued to have been in contact with forces, external forces, and I think the balance in Wałęsa's favor will be so enormous that will be put into perspective, not least because it's such a good story. It's what he did as the founder of Solidarność. And that will survive filled, of course, with criticism of himself and his leadership of how he did it and could have done it better or could have prevented the way in which Solidarność eventually started to split, how divisions appeared within it, and that will be for sophisticated political analysis. But in the balance, looking back, he will come out rather heroically.

*You've had an extraordinary time in Poland, you've seen Warsaw, like you said yesterday a pile of rubble in the 1950s, probably into the 1960s and seventies in parts of Warsaw. You learned Polish in Edinburgh, you're fascinated with the country; is it too romantic a vision? Or have you got real, or realistic about Poland?*

NA: I think I've become more realistic really. The thing about knowing Poland a little is that it's a series of continuous shocks. I understand that feeling, yes . . .

When you discover things you absolutely didn't know or didn't expect and sometimes it's about people you know and are fond of who suddenly say something or reveal they've done something, which is absolutely shocking. You can't believe they could've said that or thought that, but they did. And you discover aspects of Polishness, which you didn't . . . it's continuously adventurous, an intellectual assault course being associated with Poland as a foreigner and you're continuously astonished by what has happened. I mean, I'm pretty astonished at the government Poland has decided to elect; I didn't expect anything like this. It's been described as "anachronistic

Sarmatism.” I never thought I’d see anything like that, but there it is. Now it’s there, you begin to think of course, ‘how could I not have seen that this kind of feeling was still around, that people were still capable of crystallizing politically around a series of very mad fantasies, if you like.

*The Sarmatism label works spot on with PiS, the inferiority complex plus the swagger as a response against foreign jibes...*

NA: Yes. It’s a sense of matchless superiority. I wish it were accompanied by the kind of insane generosity, which characterized Sarmatism; people would ruin themselves simply to entertain some guests whom they liked to admire.

Yes it’s the generosity that’s missing, the compassion or the empathy, perhaps.

There’s a lot of mean-minded victimology and the need constantly to reconstruct a kind of messianism around Poland. And here we are coming back to something . . . Pope John Paul II; clear traces of Polish messianism in his approach to the nation. You could see that. I quite liked it. Because those traces were ones to control. He used them quite impressively. When I now think back to the idea of Poland as a kind of . . . at any moment some minister could say that this is the reconstituted collective Jesus Christ being crucified for the sake of Europe, I certainly hope not, but I wouldn’t be entirely surprised if this was said now. I think we’re motoring towards that kind of thing.

Fantasies are real too. There is something. I’ve very often been moved by some messianic occasions and moments. I mean just across the road from where we’re speaking. I was there when John Paul made his great speech. I feel moved when I even think about that. Because he just managed to touch people’s sense of themselves and their sense of this nation as a victim, which was in that case absolutely justified. There was this Warsaw, what had they got, what had they been through since 1939, where were they, who had denied them, somehow, what they were entitled to, which was self-respect. And that was a wonderful moment. I wasn’t sure whether I could think of any other people who would have responded with some instant understanding in that way. The myths, the myths are very real. They are

a path. They can be misused, perhaps they're being misused now—it's what we're talking about, but they're real. They still have a grip.

*On the 1050<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Poland's adoption of Christianity, a final question. 966, was it a "good thing" or is it too early to say?*

NA: How can you say it was not a "good thing" when it was the . . . . If it had not happened, what else would have happened? Suppose Poland would have remained like Lithuania, quite well-structured but non-Christian, pagan, whatever you like to call it, kingdom or set of kingdoms, what would have happened is perfectly predictable: it would have been overrun by the German with very little trouble. The point about Christianity as people keep on saying very correctly is that it helped to form the Polish state. If there hadn't been the conversion, the Polish state might have arisen in a different shape under a different name, I don't know, but it would've possibly not been in time to be in defensive shape to deal with the German eastward push during the Middle Ages. Would the great battle of Grunwald have been fought, and if it had been fought who would have won?

*The great Lithuanian victory at Grunwald you mean?*

NA: (Laughs) Yes. I can't regret it

## THE MORE THINGS CHANGE, THE MORE THEY STAY THE SAME

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MIKOŁAJ KUNICKI

INTERVIEWED BY JO HARPER

Since 2013, Dr. Kunicki, the director of the Program on Modern Poland (POMP) at St Antony's College, Oxford, has been fascinated by the relationship between nationalism, communism, authoritarianism, and religion in twentieth-century Poland.

"There is an ambivalence in church-state relations in Communist Poland, relations that oscillated between mutual confrontation, accommodation, and dialogue rather than stagnating in a state of constant struggle. Contrary to many assumptions, under Communism the bond between religion and nation in Poland grew stronger," Kunicki says.

And few illustrate this better than Bolesław Piasecki, a Polish nationalist politician who started his journey as a fascist before the war and ended it as a pro-communist activist.

Kunicki's work looks at Piasecki's earliest involvement with the far right, first with Roman Dmowski's Camp of Great Poland, and later in the mid-1930s with a group called the National Radical Camp. Kunicki's National Radical Movement (*Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny*) split from the National Radical Camp in 1934 under Piasecki's leadership. This group is perhaps the best known of the interwar Polish far-right organizations, typically referred to as Falanga.



Piasecki's life spans the period from the start of Timothy Snyder's "30-Year War" in 1914 to the anointment of the Polish pope in 1978. His life is a story of Poland's turbulent and complex relationship with modernity, with hungry neighbors, with the competing ideologies of the twentieth century and the murderous voracity of both camps. "Westerners find it hard to understand Piasecki," Kunicki says. "He was a quasi-fascist, but devoutly anti-Nazi."

During the war, Piasecki fought in the Polish Underground, leading the grouping *Konfederacja Narodu* (which merged into the *Armia Krajowa*, or Home Army, in 1943) and taking part in the fighting around Vilnius, then in Poland, now the capital of Lithuania. After the war, he was arrested by the Soviet NKVD, and in a grand—often seen as cynical—conversion, he began to cooperate with the communist government in Poland.

After the war, in 1945, Piasecki co-founded and directed a so-called social progressive movement of lay Catholics, grouped around the weekly publication *Dziś i Jutro* (Today and Tomorrow). In 1947, he created the PAX Association and was the chairman of its governing body until his death. After 1956, the importance of PAX diminished, although it remained a prominent organization until 1989, and its successors still exist today.

"Many on the Polish right still echo these views, but often without knowing it," Kunicki smiles. The discourse is one of explaining all, and changing man fundamentally, with righteous indignation and contempt for pluralism, indeterminacy, and incompleteness. "The fascist mentality, perhaps the fascist personality, will always find a home in a communist system, and the Catholic element, the quasi-religious part of communist ideology, suited Piasecki," Kunicki says.

The widely held belief was that Piasecki was a political chameleon and a villain of Polish politics. For some anticommunist dissidents in the 1970s, Piasecki was a fascist-turned-Soviet agent.

"But the truth was that he was remarkably consistent in his beliefs throughout his life. His tactical pragmatism belied the solidity of his strategic and moral beliefs. In many ways, his journey is Poland's journey, facing the need to retain some semblance of self-identity and continue to exist in the real world, a world dominated by Hitler and then Stalin," Kunicki argues.

“Piasecki was a broker between the brown and the red currents of totalitarianism, and the spiritual father of those Polish communists and non-communists alike who called for a system communist in its form and nationalist in its content,” Kunicki says. “In an attempt to legitimize their rule, they gradually employed the nationalist canon. One of the outcomes of this process was the ‘Polonization’ or ‘nationalization’ of the communist party, which culminated in the 1967–68 anti-Semitic campaign, in which Piasecki played a significant role.”

Before the war Piasecki envisioned Poland as a proto-totalitarian state integrated on the basis of ethnicity, Catholicism, and mass organization. The cornerstones of his doctrine were the notions that God was the highest destiny of man and that striving to increase the might of the nation was the path to God. The formula made religious salvation contingent on participation in the nationalist community, and Piasecki regarded the expulsion of Jews as a necessary precondition for the modernization of the country.

“But Left and Right are elusive concepts in modern Poland and Eastern Europe, and Piasecki’s programme is a perfect illustration of this point,” Kunicki argues. “His prewar ideology included ideological ingredients of the right, such as xenophobia, an exaltation of the ethnically homogenous community, religious fundamentalism, and a paramilitary movement led by a charismatic leader. On the other hand, he shared anti-capitalism with the extreme left—here overlapping with the rejection of the West—a glorification of a centralized state, a cultivation of collective identities, and historical determinism. More importantly, both Piasecki and the communists viewed their mission as constructing a new society.”

Where he would find a political home today is not clear, but there are still voices echoing Piasecki’s vision in and of Poland, Kunicki suggests.

## HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF

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MATEUSZ KIJOWSKI

INTERVIEWED BY JO HARPER IN APRIL 2016

In November 2015, a previously unknown IT consultant from Warsaw and his Facebook-based Committee for the Defense of Democracy (KOD) emerged as the only threat to the Law and Justice (PiS) government's apparent attempts to dismantle Polish democracy.

"I am a listener. People like me," Mateusz Kijowski—KOD's leader until mid-2017—says. "We will not go forward by being confrontational, but through rational dialogue, listening and finding solutions. You can only do that when people like you," he adds.

Poland hit the international headlines in late 2015 as the new government rammed home a series of changes that irked many, and not only in Poland. In March, the Council of Europe criticized PiS for its attempted overhaul of the country's top court. Officials in Washington and Brussels started putting pressure on Poland to end the crisis. The European Commission and the Council of Europe's Venice Commission both launched international investigations into the state of Polish democracy.

"It started with an article by Solidarity activist Krzysztof Łoziński, in *Studio Opini.pl* 'We need to create a KOD,'" Kijowski starts. Łoziński in the article referred to the term 'the power of the powerless,' coined by Václav Havel.

"I read it, agreed with it and shared it on Facebook," he says. And within a week it had four hundred "Likes." Encouraged, he set up a KOD Facebook page and very soon had over thirty thousand "Likes."

“When Danuta Kuroń [wife of legendary anticommunist Committee of the Defense of Workers KOR founder, Jacek Kuroń] shared it as well, I knew we were onto something,” he says.

The huge demonstrations in Poland’s main cities that followed in December and January had something of the DIY feel of the Polish anticommunist resistance, with hand-painted banners and faded jeans spread abundantly throughout the mainly middle class and middle-aged crowds.

“I see KOD as a continuation in a line from KOR through Freedom Union [one of the post-communist parties made up of the intellectual wing of Solidarity],” he says. “[The first non-communist PM, Tadeusz] Mazowiecki was a man of great virtue, he was a man of dialogue and democracy. He was my role model in many ways, ideologically and as a man.”

But Kijowski and KOD’s legitimacy—and success—perhaps lay in this lack of concrete allies and aims.

“PiS offers a community based on emotions, on exclusion and that is why conspiracy theories work,” he starts. “They need enemies and see them everywhere. We won’t give them an enemy.”

Kijowski believes there is a “Christian” and practical reason for this. “If we set up as being against PiS, when PiS disappears—which it will one day—we would have to disappear too. PiS in a sense are not important, what is important is civic education and engagement. This is about a vision of Poland that is martyrology versus openness.”

“We are building islands of civil society in Poland, places where people can talk, discuss, organize,” he says. “We are not looking for quick solutions. We want to build awareness, trust and belief among society, rebuild from the bottom up,” he went on.

The organization is formally independent of all parties, but is tied to the liberal opposition led by Nowoczesna.pl (Modern.pl) and Civic Platform (PO).

“We speak with [Nowoczesna leader Ryszard] Petru and others and cooperate with the party. You can’t change anything without politicians. But most politicians are now too weak, they don’t listen and we need to educate and help them do so. We would support a Pro-Democracy Coalition for the next elections and this would be impossible without Petru, PO and the left,” Kijowski says.

“As KOD evolves it could start to resemble party structures. For the time being we are registered as a movement from March 1 and will keep building.”

Observers argue that KOD would lose popular support if it linked up with one of the main parties, particularly with the discredited PO.

### **A NEW POLITICS?**

Kijowski likes to talk in a language of “transparency” and “public space,” an idealism that is refreshing to hear in a Poland dominated by cynicism, triumphalism, and tribalism.

But where, I ask, would he place KOD on some kind of ideological spectrum? Is this a libertarian version of some kind of new social order? Where does the state fit in, fiscal policy, taxes?

“Our support spans the political spectrum, with the exception of PiS, Kukiz’15 and the extreme right,” he says. “I am told 75 percent of those on the left support us and 38 percent of right-wing voters, but these things are meaningless,” Kijowski says.

### **AN AUTHORITARIAN SPIRAL?**

PiS cannot change the constitution as it does not have two thirds of the seats in the 460-seat parliament to do so. But KOD believes it is pushing the limits of what is acceptable in a democratic society.

Hanna Skulczewska, the press spokesperson for KOD, points to two proposed laws. One increases the government’s right to monitor private citizens’ emails under proposed anti-terrorism legislation. “The other could make it harder to organize rallies in the future,” she says.

While recognizing that all governments sometimes play with the composition of key institutions, they usually “do it quietly,” she adds. “PiS is the opposite. We don’t know what PiS’s plans are, but any consolidation of power like this is potentially dangerous.”

“Some people ask me why we in KOD are so worried if Poland still has freedom of expression and no political prisoners? I tell them that

while democracy is not yet demolished, it is losing its security mechanisms, checks and balances,” Kijowski says.

When asked if he or others from KOD have been threatened or intimidated yet, Kijowski says his mailbox was recently destroyed and that there have been largely veiled “noises” on the internet.

“But nothing physical so far and nothing from the government.” His Facebook page, he says, was hacked into and a message posted that he wanted to shoot Kaczyński. “My name came up in parliament after that,” he laughs.

“PiS is always looking for pretexts to do what it wants. I don’t see martial law happening soon, but it is a possibility.”

Meanwhile, the Catholic Church, a traditional bastion of resistance to authoritarian rule in Poland, is not helping the situation, Kijowski believes. “During communism the church was very open, offering a free space. Now it is very excluding. It was then ‘what I should do to be a better person’ and now it is ‘what you should do to be like us.’”

“Did Jaruzelski want to talk in 1981? Today is not yet the time for a new Round Table. But it will come,” he says.

## UNDERSTAND THE WAR, UNDERSTAND POLAND

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PAWEŁ UKIELSKI

INTERVIEWED BY JO HARPER

Paweł Ukielski, Deputy Director of the Warsaw Rising Museum, is an advocate of a new kind of telling of the story of Warsaw and of Poland.

“If you understand the Warsaw Rising you understand the Second World War and the twentieth century,” he says.

The Warsaw Rising Museum was opened in 2004 to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising of 1944.

Polish freedom fighters resisted the Germans for sixty-three days and eventually met annihilation and retribution while the Red army waited patiently over the Vistula. Silenced by the Soviets after the war and largely ignored by the West, the subject of the Uprising has only started to receive the attention it demands in recent years.

The museum aims to recreate the atmosphere and events of the struggle of 1944. It aims to show the importance of this symbolic act of resisting.

“The city had this brief conversation with itself after the Rising and before the Russians arrived. Civil society organized itself politically. But that conversation was interrupted.”

“The museum tells a story that is not very well-known in the West,” Ukielski says. “One Warsaw disappeared and another appeared. 1944 was a crucial moment for the city and for Poland. We had a brief mo-

ment before the Russian arrived to think about how the city could and should be rebuilt. They didn't know then that the Germans would systematically raze the city to the ground. The museum is also about educating people about Polish, but also 20th century European, history."

The Rising (*Powstanie Warszawskie*) was a major operation undertaken by the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*) to liberate Warsaw from the Nazis before the Red Army arrived.

The Rising began on August 1, 1944, as part of a nationwide rising, Operation Tempest, and also part of a wider attempt to drive the Germans from the city and draw resources away from the defense of Berlin. Politically, the goal was also to establish, even if only symbolically, Polish sovereignty by instituting and legalizing the Underground State before the Soviet-backed Polish Committee of National Liberation could take control.

The Home Army at first seized large areas of the city, but the Soviets did not advance beyond the city's borders until mid-September, and by 16 September Polish forces under Soviet command reached a few hundred meters from the Polish positions on the other side of the river but made no further headway during the Uprising. The allegation has always been that Stalin wanted the insurrection to fail so that the Soviet occupation of Poland would be uncontested.

The exact number of casualties remains unknown, although it is estimated that about 16,000 members of the Polish resistance were killed and about 6,000 badly wounded. In addition, between 150,000 and 200,000 civilians died, mostly in mass executions conducted by troops fighting on the German side. German casualties totaled over 8,000 soldiers killed and missing and 9,000 wounded. About 25 percent of Warsaw's buildings were destroyed in the fighting, and then after the Germans resumed control they systematically leveled 35 percent of the city block by block, about 85 percent of the city was destroyed by January 1945, when the Soviets finally entered the city.

"I would like to protest against mean and cowardly attitude of the British press towards the uprising in Warsaw... In general an impression was created, that the Poles deserve to be beaten, even though they were doing exactly all of this, to which allied broadcasting stations were calling them for several years. ... Remember, one always



pays for his dishonesty and cowardice. Don't even think, that for years on end you will be shoe-licking servants of the Soviet regime and then suddenly you will return to spiritual decency," George Orwell wrote on September 1st 1944.

"We have no complexes about 'the West,' as our parents' generation perhaps had, Ukielski says. "We travel, we are part of the world. But we sometimes feel as if we treated as second class members of the new Europe. We want our story told, heard and understood."

## DEFENDERS OF THE FAITH

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NEAL PEASE

INTERVIEWED BY JO HARPER, JUNE 2016

Neal Pease is Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and editor in chief of *The Polish Review*. His research and publication focus is the Catholic Church in modern Polish history. His book, *Rome's Most Faithful Daughter: The Catholic Church and Independent Poland*, won separate awards in the United States as the best book of the year in the field of Polish studies, and best book of the year in the field of the history of Catholicism.<sup>1</sup>

*How would you characterize the role of the Catholic Church in Polish twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century history?*

There is no single or simple answer to this question. First, of course, Catholicism remains the religious affiliation of the overwhelming majority of Poles, the continuation of a tradition enshrined in a thousand years of national history and tradition. Second, in the eyes of many of the faithful, the Church continues to stand as the repository and custodian of moral and patriotic values, defining and articulating what it means to be genuinely Polish. Third, it can be argued, the Church has served as the natural and most visible and effective defender of Polish rights, morale, and cultural identity against a series of non-Catholic oppressors, foreign or domestic—Protestant, Orthodox, Nazi, and Communist—that targeted and persecuted both Poland and Catholi-

<sup>1</sup> Neal Pease, *Rome's most Faithful Daughter: The Catholic Church and Independent Poland, 1914–1939* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010).

cism. Finally, the Church has been credited with having contributed materially to the liberation of the country and its people from foreign rule and dictatorship, most directly and dramatically with the downfall of Communist rule that had much to do with the influence of a Polish pope. It has been argued that the powerful influence of the Church in Polish affairs, and its undeniable services to the nation, have come at the price of insistence on a privileged place for Catholicism in public life that conflicts with ideals of tolerance and pluralism. But when all is said and done, and with due respect to Solidarity and the various forces of patriotic resistance in the world wars, no institution has meant more to the cause of Polish national survival and well-being over the difficult course of the past century than the Catholic Church

*What is the key feature of this role—does its background role or a more direct instrumental role stand out over the years?*

Broadly speaking, the Catholic tradition—at least in the modern era—has insisted on the right and duty of the Church to comment on and take a role in public life, as an extension of its spiritual duty, but preferably indirectly, in the form of defense of Christian principles, and not in an overtly partisan sense. That said, the Polish Church, or voices within it, have tended to be less shy in addressing political matters, largely due to the intensity of the country's recent history, and what the Church would see as its responsibility for the welfare of the country. But on the whole, over the years the leadership of the Polish Church has tended to be circumspect in its statements and actions on political matters, often out of a sense of needing to deal cautiously with hostile rulers. As a result, more often than not the Church has exerted its influence in Polish public life not by overt actions or statements, but simply by being itself, a religious body claiming the authority to uphold Christian principles of morality and ethics, and commanding at least the nominal allegiance of the vast majority of the population. But, of course, matters that the Church would see as issues of protecting its faith and its faithful inevitably also become "political," for example, demanding the rights of Catholics and their Church within the official atheism of the PRL.

*Catholicism and communism coexisted rather well after 1956 in Poland, some even seeing a mutual self-interest, a duopoly of sorts. After 1989 it lost its great enemy and lost its way a little, before finding a mouthpiece in PiS. Is that a fair assessment?*

I would dispute the premise of the question, to the extent that it suggests a comfortable or chummy relationship between church and state during the Communist years. While it is largely true that, after the years of high Stalinism, the Church and the PZPR worked out, with difficulty, a coexistence and *modus vivendi* seen by both parties as necessary, they likewise saw it as distasteful. The Church also developed the habit, out of its sense of duty to the nation, to act as mediator between the government and opposition, and to urge caution on the part of the opposition out of concern for the possibility of civil conflict or Soviet invasion—but there never was any doubt about where the genuine sympathies of the Church lay.

To say that PiS has become the new political standard bearer of the Church in Poland is true, to an extent, but overgeneralizes. There is no one, uniform “Catholic” viewpoint in political matters, particularly in a society like Poland in which Catholicism is the norm and cuts across partisan divides. It is fair to note that the PiS constituency is “more” Catholic than that of its opposition, in many respects, and that a significant number of clergy, hierarchs, and Catholic publicists and media outlets have lent their support to the current government, but this is by no means unanimous: one finds large numbers of laity and clergy on the other side, as well.

*What is new, if anything, about PiS’s relationship with the Church, and do you see echoes in earlier similar Church–politics relations?*

The most obvious parallel is to be found in the efforts of the interwar national-rightist groups, the representatives of Roman Dmowski’s National Democratic movement, to establish themselves as the “Catholic” party in what was then the independent Second Polish Republic, in opposition to their rivals perceived as less supportive of the Church and its interests. In fact, even then, as now, the leadership of the Polish Church largely resisted the invitations to align itself openly with the

Right, despite the considerable support it gained among the Catholic clergy and laity.

The promises made by PiS now, and the interwar Catholic nationalists in their day, to give honor to the Church and enshrine its values in national law and custom, are broadly similar, though not identical. What seems to me distinctively new about the current situation, and that encourages Polish Catholics' support of the party, is widespread apprehensiveness and skepticism about the overall tenor of the culture and direction of Europe, seen by many Poles as aggressively secular and hostile to, or dismissive of local traditions. Such objections often come tinged with populist parochialism, but they echo concerns voiced in more sophisticated, measured language by the leadership of the worldwide Church. To the extent that PiS is able to frame the political choice in Poland as one in which they pledge to uphold the patriotic and Catholic traditions of the country, and their Euro-friendly opponents cannot be trusted to do the same, this will give them a considerable advantage in appealing to the most religiously minded elements of the electorate.

*Is the power of the Church in public life diminishing or changing as you see it?*

Yes and no. In a sense, what we have seen in Poland in the past quarter century since the fall of Communism is the playing out and confirmation of a verity of ecclesiastical history, that the Christian churches have a tendency to appear their best in the face of persecution, and at their least attractive in times of official favor. The Catholic Church won near universal recognition as the genuine representative and moral voice of the Polish nation for its actions during the Second World War and the subsequent Communist epoch; once freedom was regained, it turned its focus—or, at least, was widely seen as having turned its focus—on the predictable but notably less inspiring priorities of reinforcing its institutional interests and restoring what it saw as its rightful place in national law and discourse, but others saw as imposing a narrow religious sensibility in heavy-handed fashion on a pluralistic society. In this way, the Church became more a source of political division and dispute within the country, rather than a unifying force.

By some measures, the influence of the Church in Polish public life has declined somewhat in recent years, but its presence in the country remains extraordinarily high, by world standards. Poland continues to be one of the most intensely religious countries in the western world: nearly 90 percent of Poles call themselves Catholic, a majority consider themselves practicing Catholics, and nearly half attend Mass regularly. If these are figures that reflect a weakening of religiosity in Poland, they are a weakening that the Church in almost any other country would gladly trade for.

# APPENDICES





## APPENDIX I: TIMELINE

In 1989–91, Poland underwent a democratic transition, which put an end to the People's Republic of Poland (PRL) and led to the foundation of a democratic government known as the Third Polish Republic.

### THE ROUND TABLE TALKS

The Round Table Talks took place in Warsaw from February 6 to April 5, 1989. The government initiated the discussion with the banned trade union Solidarity and other opposition groups in an attempt to defuse growing social unrest.

Following the factory strikes of the early 1980s and the subsequent formation of the (then still underground) Solidarity movement under the leadership of Lech Wałęsa, the political situation in Poland began to relax somewhat. By 1988, the authorities began serious talks with the opposition. In September 1988, when a wave of strikes was coming to an end, a secret meeting was held, which included Wałęsa and Minister of Internal Affairs Czesław Kiszczak. They agreed to hold the so-called “Round Table” talks in the near future to plan the course of action to be undertaken in the country.

The talks began on February 6, 1989 and included the Solidarity opposition faction and the coalition government faction. The meetings were co-chaired by Wałęsa and Kiszczak.

The Polish communists, led by General Jaruzelski, hoped to co-opt prominent opposition leaders into the ruling group without making major changes in the political power structure. The events in Poland precipitated the fall of the entire European communist bloc.

The “Round Table Agreement” was signed on April 4, 1989. The most important demands, including those reflected in the April Nov-  
elization, were: legalization of independent trade unions; the intro-

duction of the office of President (thereby annulling the power of the communist party's general secretary), who would be elected to a 6 year term; the formation of a Senate.

Real political power was vested in a newly created bicameral legislature and in a president who would be the chief executive.

Solidarity became a legitimate and legal political party.

Free elections to 35 percent of the seats in Sejm and an entirely free election to the Senate were assured.

The election held on June 4, 1989 brought a landslide victory to Solidarity: 99 percent of all the seats in the Senate and all of the 35 percent possible seats in the Sejm. Jaruzelski, whose name was the only one the PZPR allowed on the ballot for the presidency, won by just one vote in the National Assembly.

### THE TRANSITION

On August 19, 1989, President Jaruzelski asked journalist and Solidarity activist Tadeusz Mazowiecki to form a government; on September 12, the Sejm voted to approve Prime Minister Mazowiecki and his cabinet. For the first time in more than forty years, Poland had a government led by non-communists.

In December 1989, the Sejm (lower house of parliament) approved the government's reform program to rapidly transform the Polish economy from central planning to the free market, amended the constitution to eliminate references to the "leading role" of the communist Party, and renamed the country the "Republic of Poland." The communist Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) dissolved itself in January 1990, creating a new party in its place: Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland. Most of the property of the former communist party was turned over to the state.

The May 1990 local elections were entirely free. Candidates supported by Solidarity's Citizens' Committees won most of the elections they contested, although voter turnout was only a little over 40 percent. The cabinet was reshuffled in July 1990, and the national defense and interior affairs ministers (hold-overs from the previous communist government) were among those replaced.

In October 1990, the constitution was amended to curtail the term of President Jaruzelski. In December, Lech Wałęsa became the first popularly elected President of Poland.

### THE WAŁĘSA PRESIDENCY (1990–95)

In November 1990, Lech Wałęsa was elected President for a 5-year term. At Wałęsa's request, Jan Krzysztof Bielecki formed a government and served as its Prime Minister until October 1991, introducing globally competitive prices and greatly expanding the scope of private enterprise.

Poland's first free parliamentary elections were held in 1991. More than one hundred parties participated, representing the full spectrum of political views. No single party received more than 13 percent of the total vote. The government of Prime Minister Jan Olszewski was the first fully free and democratic Polish government since 1926. This cabinet was supported by the Kaczyński brothers. Olszewski was replaced by Hanna Suchocka as the first woman Prime Minister of Poland in 1992, after Janusz Korwin-Mikke called for the exposure of all members of the Sejm who had cooperated with the communist secret police. After a rough start, in 1993 the second free parliamentary elections were held, producing the first parliament to serve a full term. The Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) received the largest share of votes. Also in 1993, the Soviet Northern Group of Forces finally left Poland.

After the election, SLD and Polish People's Party (PSL) formed a governing coalition. Waldemar Pawlak, leader of the junior partner PSL, became Prime Minister. Relations between President Wałęsa and the Prime Minister remained poor throughout the Pawlak government, with the President charging Pawlak with furthering personal and party interests while neglecting matters of state importance. Following a number of scandals implicating Pawlak and increasing political tension over control of the armed forces, Wałęsa demanded Pawlak's resignation in January 1995. A crisis resulted, and the coalition removed Pawlak from office and replaced him with SLD's Józef Oleksy.

**KWAŚNIEWSKI'S FIRST PRESIDENCY (1995–2000)**

In November 1995, Poland held its second free presidential elections of the postwar period. SLD leader Aleksander Kwaśniewski defeated Wałęsa by a narrow margin—51.7 percent to 48.3 percent. Soon after Wałęsa's defeat, Interior Minister Andrzej Milczanowski accused then-Prime Minister Oleksy of longtime collaboration with Soviet and later Russian intelligence. In the ensuing political crisis, Oleksy resigned. The SLD-PSL coalition asked deputy Sejm speaker Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz—who was linked to, but not a member of SLD—to be his successor.

Poland's new Constitution of 1997 redefined the concept of the Polish nation in civic rather than ethnic terms. Article Thirty-Five guaranteed the rights of national and ethnic minorities, while other provisions prohibited discrimination and political organizations that propagated racial hatred.

In the 1997 parliamentary elections, two parties with roots in the Solidarity movement—Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS) and Freedom Union (UW)—won 261 of the 460 seats in the Sejm and formed a coalition government. Jerzy Buzek of AWS became Prime Minister. The AWS and the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) held the majority of the seats in the Sejm. Marian Krzaklewski was the leader of AWS, and Leszek Miller led SLD.

In April 1997, the first postcommunist constitution was finalized, and was put into effect in July. In June 2000, UW withdrew from the governing coalition, leaving AWS at the helm of a minority government.

**KWAŚNIEWSKI'S SECOND PRESIDENCY (2000–05)**

In the presidential election of 2000, Aleksander Kwaśniewski, the incumbent former leader of the postcommunist SLD, was re-elected in the first round of voting, with 53.9 percent of the popular vote. Andrzej Olechowski came in second place, with only 17.3 percent of the vote.

The 1997 constitution and the reformed administrative division of 1999 required a revision of the electoral system, which was passed in April 2001.

In the September 2001 parliamentary elections, SLD triumphed because of voter disillusionment with the AWS government and internal bickering within that bloc. Voter dissatisfaction ran so deep that that this former ruling party did not enter parliament due to its falling below the 8 percent threshold for coalitions.

SLD went on to form a coalition with the agrarian PSL and the leftist Labor Union (UP), with Leszek Miller serving as Prime Minister. This government had the support of 256 of the 460 seats in the Sejm.

A leading issue in subsequent years was negotiations with the European Union regarding accession and the internal preparations required. Poland joined the EU in May 2004. Both President Kwaśniewski and the government were vocal in their support for this cause. The only party decidedly opposed to EU entry was the populist right-wing League of Polish Families (LPR).

Despite broad popular support for joining the EU, which was considered an overriding issue, the government rapidly lost popularity due to their incompetence on various issues (e.g., highway construction, their botched reform of the health system, and numerous corruption scandals, the most infamous of which was the Rywin affair and the Starachowice affair, which involved government ministers providing information about an impending raid to their friends with links to organized crime).

In March, some prominent SLD politicians and MPs (including the then Speaker of the Sejm, Marek Borowski) splintered from the party and created the new Social Democracy of Poland party. The cabinet, led by Leszek Miller, resigned on May 2, 2004, right after Poland's admission to the European Union.

A new cabinet was formed with Marek Belka as prime minister. After two initially unsuccessful attempts, it eventually won parliamentary support on June 24<sup>th</sup> and governed until the parliamentary elections held in late 2005. Several of the new ministers were seen as non-partisan experts, and the government was considered a marked improvement on the previous cabinet. This did not carry over into any rise in voter support for SLD, however, despite an economic upturn in 2005. Part of the reason for this waning support was that this government was considered to be largely removed from the party's

core, and was put in office only because of the majority of MPs' fear of early elections.

This fear was not unfounded, as SLD saw its support drop by three fourths to only 11 percent in subsequent elections.

#### THE LECH KACZYŃSKI PRESIDENCY (2005–10)

In the autumn of 2005, Poles voted in both parliamentary and presidential elections. September's parliamentary poll was expected to produce a coalition of two center-right parties, PiS (Law and Justice) and PO (Civic Platform). During the increasingly bitter campaign, however, PiS launched a strong attack on the liberal economic policies of their allies and overtook PO in opinion polls. PiS eventually gained 27 percent of votes cast and became the largest party in the Sejm ahead of PO, which won 24 percent. The out-going ruling party, SLD, won just 11 percent of the vote.

The presidential elections held in October followed a similar script. The early favorite, Donald Tusk, leader of the PO, saw his lead in opinion polls slip away and was beaten by the PiS candidate Lech Kaczyński (one of the twins, founders of the party), 54 percent to 46 percent in the second round.

Both elections were marred by low turn-outs: only 51 percent of voters turned out in the second and decisive round of the presidential election, and just over 40 percent voted in the parliamentary election. Popular disillusionment with politicians was the suggested cause of low voter turnout.

Coalition talks ensued simultaneously with the presidential elections. However, the severity of the campaign attacks and the willingness of PiS to court the populist vote soured the relationship between the two largest parties and made the creation of a stable coalition impossible. The ostensible stumbling blocks were PiS's insistence that it control all aspects of law enforcement: the Ministries of Justice and Internal Affairs and the special forces, as well as its forcing through of a PiS candidate for the head of the Sejm with help of several smaller populist parties. PO decided to go into the opposition.

PiS then formed a minority government; Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz, a previously little-known politician, was selected to be Prime Minister instead of party leader Jarosław Kaczyński, who remained influential in the background. This government relied on the tacit and rather stable support of smaller populist and agrarian parties (Samoobrona, LPR) to govern.

The new government enjoyed very strong public support, although the popularity of the populist parties supporting it waned significantly. In January 2006, it appeared that a parliamentary crisis was looming because of these small populist parties' fear that PiS was about to force new elections, using the pretext of the failure to pass the budget within the constitutional timeframe. However, this crisis was averted.

In May 2006, a coalition agreement for a majority government was formed between PiS, Samoobrona, and LPR. In July 2006, following a rift with party leader Jarosław Kaczyński, Marcinkiewicz tendered his resignation as Prime Minister and was replaced by Jarosław Kaczyński. The following fifteen months were erratic and not without controversy, as the government pursued lustration policies, established a Central Anticorruption Bureau (CBA) with far-reaching powers, and was embroiled in a case relating to the suicide of an MP who had been under investigation for corruption. The new government also modified Polish foreign relations relating to the EU by adopting a more eurosceptical stance, which was a decided reorientation from past Polish governments' adoption of a very pro-EU position.

The uneasy alliance between the three coalition partners came to a head in July 2007 when the leader of Samoobrona, Andrzej Lepper, was dismissed from his position as Minister for Agriculture following a secret investigation by the CBA, which attempted to link him and his department to corruptive practices. The coalition agreement collapsed over the following month, with both LPR and Samoobrona leveling accusations against PiS. In September, the Sejm voted to dissolve itself (supported by PiS, but opposed by Samoobrona and LPR), paving the way for elections in October.

In the October parliamentary elections, Civic Platform, the largest opposition party, gained more than 41 percent of the popular vote.

PiS's vote increased from its share in 2005, but it was insufficient to gain reelection; both Samoobrona and LPR were wiped out, losing all representation, each having gained only a little over 1 percent of the vote. PO proceeded to form a majority governing coalition with the agrarian Polish People's Party (PSL), and PO leader Donald Tusk took over the prime ministerial office in November 2007.

On April 10, 2010, numerous members of the political elite died in the Smoleńsk air crash, including Lech Kaczyński, incumbent President of Poland. Donald Tusk decided not to run in 2010 presidential election. In PO primary elections, Bronisław Komorowski defeated the Oxford-educated Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski. In the second round of voting on July 4, 2010, he defeated Jarosław Kaczyński, and on August 6, 2010 he was sworn in as the new president of Poland.

In the November 2010 local elections, PO won 31 percent of the votes, and PiS won 23 percent, an increase for the former and a drop for the latter compared to the 2006 elections. PO won a record four consecutive elections, and Donald Tusk was left as the kingmaker. PO's dominance was seen as a reflection of the political right-wing's weakness and division, with PiS splitting in autumn 2010.

In October 2011, Donald Tusk, with a clear pro-European agenda, became the first ever Polish Prime Minister to be reelected in post-communist Poland.

#### THE DUDA PRESIDENCY (2015–PRESENT)

After two rounds of elections in May 2015, the opposition Law and Justice candidate, Andrzej Duda, became President by a 3 percent margin.

On November 18, just two days after the new PIS government came into power, President Duda pardoned Mariusz Kaminski, a confidant of PiS leader Jarosław Kaczyński, allowing him to coordinate the country's secret security services. The four heads of Polish security services "voluntarily resigned." Earlier in 2015, Kaminski had been sentenced to three years in prison for abuse of power while running an anti-corruption office in 2007, during Law and Justice's first gov-



ernment. Duda pardoned him even before Kaminski's appeal was heard, which was considered unprecedented in democratic Poland.

On January 7, 2016, a new media law was signed, which dismissed the managers and supervisory board members of Poland's public broadcasters effective immediately, and made the finance minister responsible for choosing senior officials in state/public broadcasting services.

## APPENDIX II: GLOSSARY

### THE CAST

**Dmowski, Roman.** Father of Poland's right and antithesis of Piłsudski. Believed that Poland should concentrate on the nation and reduce its borders to include only the heartlands. This vision had no place for the numerous minorities of the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth (IRP). The godfather of the Polish right and the concept of Poland for the Poles. Both Dmowski and Piłsudski are more nuanced than stereotypes allow for, and their thinking is very simplified.

**Kaczyński, Jarosław.** Lives for politics. A master tactician whose modus operandi is to sow as much discord and generate as much conflict as possible, and then profit from the ensuing confusion. He can, thus, pose as a defender of Poland's virtues. Strategically offensive, tactically defensive. He is the power in Poland, not the president nor prime minister. Though formally not in the government, he operates like in the PRL—party takes precedence over government, rendering government illusory; an *éminence grise* who is anything but.

**Kaczyński, Lech.** The older of the political twins. Former Mayor of Warsaw and President whose term was cut short by the Smoleńsk air crash. A participant in the Round Table talks now reviled by PiS. PiS has been posthumously grooming him for recognition as the greatest president Poland has ever had.

**Macierewicz, Antoni.** Currently the defense minister and a former member of KOR. Obsessed with proving that the Smoleńsk air crash was a Putin-Tusk assassination. The liberal media loves to hate Macierewicz arguing that he is the *spiritus movens* of the government.

**Michnik, Adam.** Editor of the liberal *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Former member of KOR and a leading light of the opposition. Leading

spokesman of liberal Poland, and as such comes under fire for introducing issues such as political correctness, gender questions, and the degradation of patriotism in Poland.

**Piłsudski, Józef.** One of the titans of interbellum Polish politics. Originally a socialist activist and Central Powers agent, in November 1918, he proclaimed the rebirth of Poland. He then led the country against Bolshevik invaders. He won an astounding tactical victory at Warsaw in August 1920, but critics argue that Poland's war aims were lost at the subsequent treaty negotiations of Brest-Litovsk in 1921. He retired from active politics, as an *éminence grise*. Tired of the political chaos of the mid 1920s, he staged a military coup in May 1926, initiating the Sanacja era (the colonels' government), but he preferred government from a distance. A Lithuanian nobleman, his vision was of a reconstructed seventeenth-century Poland, i.e. the sun in a constellation of minor East European stars.

**Tusk, Donald.** Former prime minister and leader of the PO government who jumped from the sinking PO ship to a plum job in the EU. Jarosław Kaczyński assigns blame for much of Poland's ills to Tusk and his eight years at the helm of the government. Tusk was ruthless with competition within the party and represented the decadent phase of Polish liberalism, displaying arrogance, money grabbing, and disdain for the electorate.

**Wałęsa, Lech.** The fallen idol. In the West, he *is* 1980s Poland and represents the country's successful bid to free itself from Russian subjugation. His reputation is in tatters currently, as, to his critics, he is not only Bolek, who sold out his fellow workers in the 1970s, but is compromised because of his early 1990s presidency: a puppet of the security services who lined their pockets during his administration. Enough mud was flung and much has stuck.

**Ziobro, Zbigniew.** Minister of Justice. The prodigal son who left PiS, formed Solidarity Poland, and has now returned, although he still remains the head of his micro party. His attitude is authoritarian and normative rather than procedural. Tasked with cleaning out the Au-

gean stables of the judiciary, which PiS regards as the last bastion of communist privilege. The fox in charge of the henhouse.

## POLITICS

**II RP (Druga Rzeczpospolita).** The Second Republic 1918–39. Named Second because the first was the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569–1795).

**III RP.** The Polish republic after the PRL ended in 1989. Note the constitutional link not to the PRL but to the Second Republic. The PRL is, therefore, an aberration.

**IV RP.** Derogatory term by the liberal media for the Poland PiS will create.

**Endecja Narodowa Democracja.** National Democracy. The prewar right Christian-Democrat party.

**ONR (Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny).** The National Radical Camp, the heirs to the pre-war fascistic (albeit more on the Italian model ONR), which was delegalized in 1934 and reactivated in 1993. Electorally insignificant, but has an influence out of proportion with its poll ratings. Poland for the Poles!

**PRL (Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa).** The Polish People's Republic, 1946–92.

**Sanacja.** The military regime that governed Poland between 1926 and 1939. "Sanacja" means cleansing or a moral renewal.

**Solidarity.** The trades union of the 1980. Still a trades union, but currently identified with PiS, and especially the poorly paid and badly treated public sector service workers. Despite its name, in the 1980s, Solidarity was anything but—more like a seventeenth-century confederation (semi-legal rebellion against regal excesses) temporarily

united to achieve a goal. The politics, certainly between PO and PiS, leading up to the 2015 election only make sense if they are seen as infighting within the former solidarity ranks. Old generals arguing about the battles they fought, unable to reach a conclusion, and repositioning their histories.

## CONCEPTS

**Accursed Soldiers.** The name given to those groups and individuals who chose or who were inspired to fight the communist regime from 1945–53. The new heroes of the moment.

**BMW (Bierny Mierny ale Wierny).** Passive, mediocre, but loyal. Supposedly, the slogan PRL used in the halls of power to describe the qualities looked for in a subordinate. Still in use today.

**Dobra zmiana.** Good change. The name coined by Jarosław Kaczyński to describe the basket of reforms he introduces. Critics use this term ironically.

**Folwark.** The manor house. The idea that, spiritually speaking, Poland is still in the seventeenth century. Power is haphazard and capricious, and the point is to kowtow to the lord while treating underlings arbitrarily. Much of Polish corporate life is reportedly based on this hierarchical model of power and decision-making.

**Gruba kreska.** Thick line. The phrase used to describe the decision by Tadeusz Mazowiecki's government during the 1990s to move on and not prosecute or otherwise hold communist officials accountable in a Nuremberg-style trial.

**KOD (Komitet Obrony Demokracji).** The social movement that began after PiS won the election in Fall 2015, and took protest onto the streets. Because the parliamentary opposition is weak and divided, KOD still constitutes a force to be reckoned with.

**KOR (Komitet Obrony Robotników).** Worker's Defense Committee. Formed by intellectuals and lawyers in the late 1970s to advise workers on their rights and tactics in case of arrest. Provided much of the spiritual and intellectual firepower to complement blue-collar Solidarity.

**Moherowe berety.** Mohair berets. The little old ladies—religious, conservative, suspicious of outsiders—who listen to *Radio Maryja* and wear a mohair beret to church. The *bien pensant* urban liberals use the phrase derogatorily to describe backwardness in general. To the *moherowe berety*, it is a mark of pride.

**Polska A, Polska B.** Poland A and Poland B. Phrases used in the 2015 election campaign to describe the cultural and geographic divisions of Poland. “A” describes Poland west of the Vistula, the big cities, the educated bourgeoisie, the former Prussian Partition. “B” describes Poland east of the Vistula, the former Russian partition, culturally more conservative, devout, and skeptical of the west. Voting patterns reflected the divide: PO had strong support in Poland “A” and PiS in Poland “B.” In 2015, instead of PO moving east, PiS conquered the west.

**Round Table.** The negotiations that took place in the late 1980s between the opposition, government, and communist party to create a peaceful resolution to Poland's revolution. Initially hailed as the paradigm for postcommunist countries to emulate, critics have derided it as a stitch up between the party and opposition; a new Fourth Partition. The seeds of much personal enrichment and transfer of power were sown here according to PiS.

**Sarmatism.** An indigenous cultural movement of the seventeenth century. Polish nobles thought of themselves as heirs to the Sarmatians, adopting not only their Eastern manners and dress but also the attitudes: a fierce and stubborn pride in their freedoms, and a simultaneous superiority and inferiority complex.

**Shock Therapy.** The 1990s economic policies of headlong privatization initiated by Professor Leszek Balcerowicz. The “losers” were the

workers in the state-owned factories or the collective farms, who are said to be PiS's natural constituency.

**TKM (Teraz, kurwa, My!).** Now it's our fucking turn. Reportedly, the words used by President Kwaśniewski upon assuming power in 1993. It is now used to describe the attitude of new to incumbent governments. We are in charge now; there will be a wholesale replacement of officials in politics, the media, and public sector enterprises. PiS went into the elections promising to do away with nepotism and cronyism, only to do the same themselves.

**Układ.** The system or network. Used to describe the hidden but real networks of power, influence, and patrimony.

#### ROMANTIC AND POST-ROMANTIC POETS AND DRAMATISTS

**Gombrowicz, Witold (1904–1969).** A writer whose works are characterized by deep psychological analysis, a certain sense of paradox and the absurd, an anti-nationalist flavor, and the critical examination of class roles in Polish society and culture. Author of *Ferdydurke* and *Trans-Atlantyk*.

**Mickiewicz, Adam (1798–1855).** A poet, dramatist, essayist, publicist, translator, professor of Slavic literature, and political activist. He is regarded as the national poet in Poland, Lithuania, and Belarus. A principal figure in Polish Romanticism, he is best known for the poetic drama *Dziady* (Forefathers' Eve) and the national epic poem *Pan Tadeusz*.

**Norwid, Cyprian Kamil (1821–1883).** A poet, dramatist, and painter regarded as one of the second generation of romantics. Norwid's original and non-conformist style was not appreciated during his lifetime, and it was only in the twentieth century that his work was rediscovered and appreciated.

**Prus, Bolesław (1847–1912).** A leading and definitive figure in the history of Polish literature. A writer, essayist, and journalist. In *The Doll*, he depicts life in Warsaw under Russian rule in the late 1870s, describing a vibrant panorama of social conflict, political tensions, and personal suffering: the embattled aristocracy, the new men of finance, Dickensian tradesmen, and the urban poor.



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